DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 550 EA 021 320

AUTHOR Flinders, David J.
TITLE Voices from the Classroom: Educational Practice Can Inform Policy.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-86552-093-3
PUB DATE 89
CONTRACT OERI-R-188062004
NOTE 92p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publication Sales, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1787 Agate Street, Eugene, OR 97403 ($7.75 prepaid, quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; High Schools; *Staff Development; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Teacher Welfare; *Teaching Conditions

ABSTRACT

Educational policy discussions typically exclude the teacher's voice and ignore constraints of time, energy, and resources that challenge teachers and hinder policy implementation. The case studies presented in this monograph attempt to restore the teacher's perspective. Rather than analyzing policy shortfalls stemming from teacher "apathy" or "incompetence," the booklet studies three successful high school English teachers committed to their profession and to visions of "best practice" within diverse classroom contexts. A qualitative approach based on interviews, classroom observations, and examination of written documents was employed to construct the case studies. Each case study contains a description of the teacher's school day and interpretive sections examining work demands and teaching strategies. All three teachers worked at suburban, comprehensive high schools with enrollments of about 1,500. Confronted with persistent demands of curriculum management, large classes, and time constraints, all teachers studied developed conservation and isolationist strategies to ensure their daily survival. Teachers' work environments resemble other "street level bureaucracies" (like police stations and welfare offices) characterized: by (1) inadequate resources; (2) ambiguous goals; (3) unclear performance evaluation criteria; and (4) nonvoluntary clients. Fortunately, the teachers did not process their students as they did their curricula, but negotiated cooperative alliances with students and bent rules in their interest. Policymakers need to follow these teachers' example and seek alliances with teachers, develop supportive staff development programs, relinquish tight control over classroom methods, and revamp their stereotyped images of teachers. (22 references) (MLH)

ED311550

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE *CAN* INFORM POLICY

David J. Flinders

Foreword by Milbrey McLaughlin

ERIC

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
University of Oregon

2

EA 021 320

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE *CAN* INFORM POLICY

David J. Flinders

Foreword by Milbrey McLaughlin

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
University of Oregon
1989

International Standard Book Number 0-86552-093-3
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-85176

Printed in the United States of America, 1989

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
University of Oregon
1787 Agate Street
Eugene OR 97403
(503) 686-5043

Design: University Publications, University of Oregon.

The University of Oregon is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution.

Prior to publication, this manuscript was submitted for critical review and determination of professional competence. The publication has met such standards.

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. OERI-R 188062004. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Department of Education. No federal funds were used in the printing of this publication.

ABOUT ERIC AND ERIC/CEM

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. ERIC serves educators by disseminating research results and other resource information that can be used in developing more effective educational programs.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966. The Clearinghouse's subject area includes educational administration, policy, law, and facilities at the elementary and secondary levels.

ERIC/CEM NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Donald Tharpe, Executive Director, Association of School Business Officials International

Jim Bencivenga, Education Editor, The Christian Science Monitor

Gordon Cawelti, Executive Director, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Patrick Forsyth, Executive Director, University Council for Educational Administration

Joyce G. McCray, Executive Director, Council for American Private Education

Richard D. Miller, Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators

Philip K. Piele (Chairman), Professor and Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management

Samuel Sava, Executive Director, National Association of Elementary School Principals

Thomas Shannon, Executive Director, National School Boards Association

Scott Thomson, Executive Director, National Association of Secondary School Principals

Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, National Association of State Boards of Education

STAFF

Philip K. Piele, Professor and Director
Keith A. Acheson, Associate Director
Stuart C. Smith, Director of Publications
Adrienne Lannom, Document Processing
Mary Lou Finne, User Services Coordinator
Donna Atto, Acquisitions Coordinator

Preface

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management is pleased to publish this monograph, which argues that educational policy must be founded on an accurate understanding of the realities of classroom teaching. Not only policy-makers but school administrators and teachers themselves will benefit from David J. Flinders' vivid description of teachers' work and his suggestions for a cooperative relationship between policy-makers and school practitioners.

Flinders received his Ph. D. from Stanford University in 1987. That year his doctoral research was selected for ASCD's Outstanding Dissertation Award. He is currently an assistant professor of education at the University of Oregon where his professional interests focus on curriculum theory and qualitative research. In addition to having published in *Curriculum Inquiry*, the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, and *Educational Leadership*, he has also coauthored a book with C. A. Bowers, *Responsive Teaching: An Ecological Approach to Classroom Patterns of Language, Culture, and Thought* (1989).

Philip K. Piele
Professor and Director

Contents

	Foreword	**ix**
	Introduction	**1**
1	**Professional Life in Schools**	**3**
	Derivation of the Case Studies	3
	The Conceptual Framework	4
2	**A Case Study of Teaching in Context: Alan Hargrove**	**6**
	An Exceptional Teacher	8
	Daily Routines	9
	Teaching Constraints	15
	Teaching Strategies	20
	Support for Teaching	23
3	**A Case Study of Professional Isolation: Peter Karlin**	**25**
	Daily Routines	27
	Work Constraints and Teaching Strategies	35
4	**A Case Study of Classroom Practicalities: Susan Nathanson**	**43**
	Daily Routines	44
	Teaching Constraints	51
	Survival Strategies	54
	Epilogue	58
5	**The Teacher as Street-Level Bureaucrat**	**60**
	Conservation Strategies	60
	Beyond Curriculum Management	65
6	**The Teacher as Negotiator**	**67**
	A Cooperative Alliance	67
	Flexibility	71
7	**Policy Implications**	**72**
	The Work-Resource Dilemma	72
	External Control vs. Human Judgment	78
	Conclusion	**80**
	Bibliography	**81**

Foreword

Policy discussions typically frame issues of educational practice either in terms of inputs—curriculum, technology, or dollars, for example—or in terms of outputs—most especially student achievement. These factors, after all, are those most amenable to policy action and oversight and so have become familiar targets for initiatives aiming to improve educational practice.

But, as almost two decades' experience with efforts to "reform" classroom practice has shown, policy has uneven and not always predictable consequences for what teachers do. Further, policy attention to classroom inputs, we have learned, has an uncertain, unpredictable, and often disappointing relationship to educational outcomes. As David Flinders' study shows, the reasons for this largely indeterminate relationship between policy and practice lie primarily in the everyday realities of classroom teaching.

What teachers do everyday and the workplace conditions within which they go about their task set boundaries and constraints on practice not typically considered by policy. Yet, these workplace conditions and classroom realities determine fundamentally how or even whether teachers respond to policy mandates and objectives.

Flinders' case studies of three high school English teachers elaborate the many ways in which classroom practice and teachers' conception of their task are constructed almost on a daily basis as teachers respond to diverse features of their workplace environment—student interests and motivation, parent pressures, resource scarcity, community support, school routines, and departmental environment, for example.

This book is not another analysis of policy shortfalls or classroom disappointments rooted in explanations of teachers' "apathy," "indifference," or "incompetence." Flinders studied successful teachers, individuals who are enthusiastic about their discipline, who are committed to teaching, and who, by report, are good at what they do. These engaging portraits draw us into the deliberations and professional choices of three very different teachers—each working to realize his or her vision of "best practice" within diverse classroom contexts. Flinders allows us to

experience the everydayness of teaching, the frustrations, the rewards, and the adaptations that inevitably result when teachers try to reconcile their values, goals, expectations, and energy with the classroom realities they confront.

David Flinders' work captures the teacher's voice that often is absent from conversations about policy and the ways policy can enhance practice. His lessons from the classroom comprise a valuable resource for policy makers or students of education who want to understand more about the "black box" of classroom practice, the ways in which context matters, and the reasons why policy initiatives often disappoint. It provides rich description of the messy, complex, variegated world of the classroom teacher and so illuminates opportunities and limitations for policy and for practice. Flinders concludes that educational practice *can* inform policy; the reader will certainly conclude that it should.

Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin
Associate Professor of Education and Director, Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching
Stanford University

Introduction

The educational community holds a vital interest in classroom teaching. Yet, as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) argues, our images of the teacher tend to be one-dimensional. Teachers are either idealized as dedicated, caring, and self-sacrificing, or they are denigrated as lazy, inept, and self-serving. They are widely praised for education's successes and widely blamed for its failures. Yet rarely is the full complexity of their professional experience recognized. School reform efforts of the 1970s and early 1980s, for example, largely ignored the teacher's world. Ian Westbury (in Elbaz 1983) notes that such reforms were typically developed by people outside the classroom who assumed that the teacher's role was to "deliver" new mandated programs to their students. As a result, well-intentioned reforms, ranging from "teacher-proof" curriculum to programmed instruction, often forced teachers into a defensive posture.

The view of teachers as passive conduits of change has proved to be both conceptually limiting and empirically unfounded. Research reported by Milbrey McLaughlin (1976), for example, portrays classroom change as an adaptive process in which teachers actively modify program goals and materials in order to accommodate their own needs and the needs of their particular students. McLaughlin's findings represent the one clear lesson we have learned from two decades of implementation research: what counts in educational reform is how it affects the day-to-day interaction between teachers and students at the classroom level.

Educational policy-makers are now proposing a "new" reform agenda that is designed to address problems within the teaching profession itself. Examples of this new reform movement include the nationally recognized Carnegie (1986) and Holmes (1986) reports. Specific proposals include merit pay, master teacher programs, and the development of career ladders or "lattices." These reforms may be long overdue and sorely needed. Nevertheless, the assumption that teachers will be motivated solely by opportunities for career advancement betrays our naive understanding of what teaching is about. Thus, it would seem we still have much to learn from teachers regarding the nature of their

professional commitment and the realities of their work.

This monograph reports the findings of a qualitative study on the professional lives of high school teachers (Flinders 1987). Chapter 1 describes the focus, conceptual framework, and methodology of this research. Each of chapters 2, 3, and 4 presents a case study portraying the daily classroom routines of a high school English teacher. The final chapters outline the major "lessons" and policy implications drawn from this research.

Chapter 1

Professional Life in Schools

If we take seriously the notion that teaching is an extraordinarily complex personal experience, then understanding this experience becomes more than just a technical "research" problem of deciding what to measure and how to measure it. A classroom researcher may count the frequency of specific teaching behaviors, analyze the particular tasks that comprise the teacher's work, and record verbatim how teachers describe what they do. In the end, however, a perceptive teacher might well respond: "You have now learned something about my performance, but not about what it means for me to teach. My work is much more than you can observe, and even more than I can describe." The dilemma all researchers must face is that we have no sure way to "get inside" teachers and experience their work as they experience it. We can develop an understanding of such experience—it is not a "closed door." Yet this requires that we spend time with teachers not as outside evaluators or supervisors, but rather as students of their profession.

Derivation of the Case Studies

The design and methodology of the research reported here is based on comparative case studies of six high school English teachers. Overall, I spent well over 200 hours talking with these teachers individually and observing the daily routines of their work. Observations of each teacher spanned a minimum of five consecutive days, from the time the teacher arrived at school in the morning until he or she left in the late afternoon. Formal interviews were conducted on at least three separate occasions with each teacher. In addition, I interviewed members of community advisory groups, supervisors, and school administrators. I also collected written documents such as course descriptions, class handouts, and sample curriculum materials. The information secured through these methods was then used to write six

case studies, three of which are included in the following chapters.*

Each of these case studies contains a descriptive account of the teacher's school day as well as interpretive sections that focus on work demands and teaching strategies. All the teachers who participated in the research taught at suburban, comprehensive high schools with student bodies of about 1,500. The first case study (chapter 2) is of a teacher working in a school that serves an upper-middle-class, professional community. The following two case studies (chapters 3 and 4) are of teachers employed at a school that serves a working-class, lower-income population.

The Conceptual Framework

Although this study builds on previous empirical research in the area of classroom organization (see, for example, Doyle 1986), its particular focus is on what teachers learn—both explicitly and implicitly—from the conditions under which they work. Such learning, of course, is influenced by a bewildering variety of factors, including professional norms, school culture, and the practical constraints of the classroom. Thus, making sense of this professional learning process requires a conceptual framework that offers some meaningful way in which to describe the primary characteristics of teaching.

In developing such a framework, I have relied on Michael Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy. This theory attempts to locate the place of the individual within institutional settings where public service workers interact directly with clients and have substantial discretion in determining how this interaction takes place. Street-level bureaucracies include public agencies such as police departments, welfare offices, the lower courts, and schools. The work environment in these settings cannot be described as highly rational. Rather they are characterized by (1) inadequate resources relative to work demands, (2) vague or ambiguous agency goals, (3) unclear criteria for evaluating worker performance, and (4) nonvoluntary clients.

Lipsky's theory provides a way of thinking about some of the

*The type of case study developed in this research is further described in Eisner (1985a).

central dimensions of teaching with which teachers must learn to cope. First, teachers must interact with students on a regular basis and are responsible (within limits) for how this interaction takes place. Second, resources (the teacher's time and energy) are likely to be inadequate relative to what teachers are expected to accomplish (Goodlad 1984). In other words, the teacher's work is rarely finished in any definitive sense. If time and energy were available, more text material could always be covered, students could always be given additional help, and so forth. Third, a teacher's performance is often difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate in a clear and unambiguous fashion. And finally, students tend to be nonvoluntary.

Few teachers, I suspect, would relish the label of "bureaucrat," street-level or otherwise. Lipsky, however, uses the term in a technical rather than a pejorative sense. Doing so highlights the teacher's active role in influencing educational policy, at least as it is experienced by students in the classroom. Lipsky's theory is also important in that it suggests the adaptive nature of teaching strategies. High school teachers, for example, who face five or six successive classes of thirty students each are likely to use textbooks and worksheets not only to promote student learning, but also as survival mechanisms for coping with the practical demands of their daily schedules.

Lipsky's theory raises a number of questions. What specific demands characterize classroom teaching? How do teachers organize their work in response to these demands? What strategies do they develop? And how do these strategies influence the quality of instruction that students receive? In order to address these questions we must turn to the daily routines of classroom teaching. The following chapters provide this opportunity.

Chapter 2

A Case Study of Teaching in Context: Alan Hargrove

Alan, Mark, and I walk from the front door to the street, each of us balancing a mug of coffee in one hand and papers or a notebook in the other. We stop at the curb, and Alan glances first back at Bradley's house and then at the low, overcast sky. Bradley, one of the eight students on the academic decathlon team, lives in an unremarkable upper-middle-class neighborhood. The houses that line the street are set back, their single-story, horizontal architecture obscured by redwood fences, trees, and a forest of green shrubbery. Only a few two-car garages are plainly visible from the street. Inside these houses live business managers, high tech engineers, insurance executives, college professors, and corporate accountants. Their children, like Bradley, attend either Northway or Parkside, the two local high schools.

Alan Hargrove and Mark Reese, my two companions on this wet November morning, coach the Northway Acadeca (academic decathlon) team. Their job is to prepare eight Northway students to compete against other high school teams on a series of examinations in ten subject areas. Their first competition, a regional affair, is scheduled for this weekend, and the two coaches have surrendered their regular teaching responsibilities for Friday in order to meet with the Acadeca team in a day-long study session. Earlier in the week, Bradley had volunteered his house as a meeting place for this last-minute study marathon. As Alan's "shadow," I welcomed the opportunity to join them, hoping to learn more about Alan's work and his students.

Alan, Mark, and I had left the students and ventured outside to make a decision. Of the eight team members, two need to be designated as alternates in tomorrow's competition. The alternates will still take the exams, but not all of their scores will be counted in judging the team's overall performance. It is a difficult decision for the coaches because the alternates will play a less prestigious role than the other team members. Mark, now standing closest

to the curb, begins our discussion:

> Well let's see, Dan and Jennifer are juniors; Paul and Lisa are seniors, so they won't get another chance next year. Dan's speech has improved immensely. [shrugging his shoulders] Look, I'm just talking it out....

As his voice trails off, Alan picks up the discussion, "As it stands now, I'd go with Dan and Lisa." Mark, however, is still hesitant, still weighing the possibilities: "Well, Paul and Lisa would be the most crushed. Lisa has really had a bad year at home." Now looking at his notes, Alan adds, "Paul did better than Lisa on the test today, but Lisa was a thousand points ahead on the earlier quizzes." Considerations are made and a decision reached. As we walk back to the house, Mark comments to me in an aside, "Evaluation is the worst part of teaching. Some students think we enjoy it; they think it gives us a chance to be vindictive, but that's just not true."

Inside the house, the students have been waiting expectantly. They greet us with an awkward and tense silence as we casually take off our jackets and sit down. Alan assumes responsibility for breaking the news:

> We really had to wrestle with this decision. No matter what we decided, someone would feel hurt. It was difficult; we took a lot of things into consideration. All of you have improved so much. [The sudents look on impatiently.] I remember years ago when I first began coaching baseball. I remember the first time I had to cut someone from the team. I called this poor kid over to tell him. [Alan stands up as he continues the story.] I felt terrible and didn't know what to say, but he had to be cut. So he comes over, standing in front of me like this, and I'm nervous. I just can't look this kid in the eye, so I'm looking down, and what do you think I see?...[He pauses]...brand-new baseball shoes. Right then something inside of me just died. [Again pauses] We've decided that Paul and Jennifer will serve as our alternates.

The tension in the room quickly subsides while Mark attempts to play down the issue by commenting on the importance of the alternate's role. Paul and Jennifer accept the decision quietly. The students shuffle their notes, and finally one of them suggests that they all get on with their work.

An Exceptional Teacher

I have introduced Alan Hargrove, one of his colleagues, and a few of his students. While observing Alan, I quickly learned that he enjoys an almost "super star" reputation at Northway High School. Whenever I mentioned his name, other teachers would nod and smile knowingly as if to say, "Ah yes, well Alan *is* an exceptionally good teacher." Students, particularly the more academically skilled, flock to Alan's classes under the consensus that "Hargrove is one of the best English teachers around." This reputation is not difficult to understand. At the age of forty-five, Alan emanates a youthful good will that is difficult to resist. In the classroom he is relaxed and confident, articulate and fun-loving. His knowledge of English literature is extensive; his instruction is both rigorous and enjoyable. Before describing Alan's teaching more fully, however, let me provide some information that will help place his teaching career within a broader context.

Alan attended Catholic schools until he was fourteen, then continued his education at a public high school. Alan decided while he was still in high school that he wanted to teach. He recalls his reasons for this early decision:

> In part I wanted to emulate one or two really exceptional teachers, and it was in part that I saw some rather poor teaching, and I thought I could do better than that. I guess...high school was such an enjoyable experience for me that it was something that I'd like to remain identified with.
>
> I remember one of the more salient comments by a fellow I used to coach football with. One day we were walking out to practice and suddenly he just grabbed me and threw me into a sort of bear hug. He stopped and said, "You know the great thing about teaching? You never have to grow up." We kind of laugh about it, but I suppose there's a little bit to that. I go in the classroom, and I certainly don't become an eighteen-year-old, but it's a fairly casual sort of atmosphere, and we have fun together.

Alan began teaching English in 1962, and after his second year he transferred to Northway High School the first year it opened. He recalls that Northway opened in the midst of a progressive educational tide. The key buzzwords at the time were "relevance," "critical thinking," and "individuality." Classes were held in ninety-minute blocks, and by the late 1960s the English department offered a broad array of electives, including: "Science

Fiction," "The Literature of Sports," and "The Poetry of Rock." A local newspaper described the new school with the headline, "A School Without Bells."

Alan notes that Northway is now "a very, very different place." The changes he describes have affected the overall conceptual environment of his work:

> We are back 180 degrees, as you know, with the whole "back to basics" sort of thing. Expectations are changing . . . . Suddenly the schools are once again to be the authoritarian figure that's going to whip the kids into shape. We have Saturday school now for tardies and detention. I taught Literature of Sports for six, seven years. Now I'm teaching Hardy and Dickens and College English, and if that means occasionally giving the kids an SAT practice to prep on, I can play that game, if that's what the community wants.

Daily Routines

Currently Alan teaches two advanced English classes, two periods of journalism, and a course designed for the academic decathlon team. His teaching day begins at 8:00 with an elective course titled "Victorian Novels." He identifies this as his most difficult class because it is the first year he has taught this particular course. Victorian Novels is taken by thirty juniors and seniors. One of these students described the course in an essay. She writes:

> "Good morning boys and girls!" "Good morning Mr. Hargrove!" the class responds. Although hard to believe, I began my first period English class every morning like this, similar to the way a student during the Victorian era would have begun her day. The semester class, entitled Victorian Novels, covers the works of Dickens and Hardy: *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield* by Dickens; and assorted poetry, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* by Hardy . . . . Mr. Hargrove is an inspiring teacher. His cheerfulness and love of teaching is exemplified by the way he begins his class with this enthusiastic greeting. Even on Monday morning when the class is all but enthusiastic and our reply is weak to nonexistent, he encourages us saying, "Come on, let's try that (our daily greeting) again. I know you can do better than that!" He keeps the atmosphere of this rigorous academic course light and fun by cracking jokes, always

> smiling and in a good mood....An example of his innovative teaching methods is when he brought in an old kerosene lamp and the sound effects of a storm. The class sat in a circle with only the dim lamp light while he read *Bleak House* to us as a Victorian father might have read to his family.

The primary method of instruction used in Alan's first period is a form of class discussion that he playfully refers to as "literary show-and-tell." Together with their reading assignments, Alan asks his students to select short passages that they view as significant in terms of theme, character development, setting, or plot. In class, the students take turns reading the passages they have selected and explaining their significance. Alan comments on his use of this technique:

> I discovered probably ten years ago that it finally gets rather frustrating to conduct the sort of typical English teacher's discussion where I cook up some wonderful questions that are going to Socratically lead them to the truth, and then go in on any given day and answer probably half the questions myself, or keep asking the more obvious questions and virtually answer the questions myself. A turning point, again eight or ten years ago, was when a student came in early and I said, "What did you think of the reading? Did you see some important things in the reading last night?" And he said, "No, I thought I'd wait to come to class and find out from you what's important." So I evolved a little thing called literary show-and-tell, a way to ask the students to do more than simply pass their eyes over the material, and really for them to carry class discussion along.... don't know that I could conduct a class discussion in any other way now.

Class discussions based on this format are a shared responsibility that involve an active give-and-take between teacher and student. The students offer their views on a particular reading, and Alan offers his. What emerges from this dialogue is a critical analysis of their assigned readings.

Lecture, film, and inclass assignments are rarely used in Alan's first period. Once Alan boasted that he planned to teach his first-period course without showing the students a single film or videotape, an almost apocryphal claim among high school English teachers trapped in our multimedia age. Alan's first-period students are evaluated primarily on the basis of short critical essays that Alan assigns periodically throughout the

semester. True/false and multiple choice exams, which so often characterize classroom experience, are almost completely absent.

Preparation Periods

Following Alan's first class, he has two free periods for class preparation. Alan utilizes this time for a variety of purposes: correcting and grading student essays, duplicating handouts, reading or rereading assigned novels, planning assignments, and writing letters of reference for his students. Alan also uses this time to confer with Mark, his partner in coaching the academic decathlon team. Their conversations are typically brief: "Well, what do we have planned for today? Review? OK, I'll type up some practice questions. Will you have time to find out what filmstrips are available on the art topics?"

Alan's preparation periods are less structured than his class periods. His activities during this time seem to be determined by a rather practical decision-rule: First, what needs to be done now? What needs to be done today? Am I prepared for fourth period? Am I ready for fifth and sixth? These immediate concerns form his first-tier priorities. Other activities such as correcting student essays, writing letters, long-term planning, and reading ahead can wait to be done either at home or tomorrow morning before school. These second-tier activities maintain a constant holding pattern, always ready to fill any free time once immediate concerns are nailed down.

College English

Fourth period Alan teaches College English. The school catalogue describes this course as follows:

> The focus is on college-level work in reading and writing and includes study of such titles as *Lord Jim, The Sound and the Fury, Moby Dick* and extensive work in poetry. The course culminates in preparation for the Advanced Placement examination in English.

As in first period, Alan relies heavily on class discussions conducted on the literary show-and-tell format. During the week I observed this class, the students were reading Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment.* By way of introduction, Alan talked with

the class briefly about the central theme of conflict found throughout the novel. He began this short introduction by writing on the blackboard a number of paired contrasts: "I/We," "Head/Heart," "Assert/Submit," and so forth. The notion of conflict helped provide a conceptual framework for understanding the novel, and Alan continually led class discussions back to this central theme.

Lectures, film, and small-group work are rarely used during fourth period. Alan evaluates his students on the basis of essays; objective type tests are again rare. Students are admitted to College English by examination and recommendation only; enrollment is limited to twenty-five. The students in this class represent the top seniors at Northway. As Alan notes, "If this class is typical, and I think it will be, three-quarters of them will score fours and fives on the AP exam; about a third will score five, the highest score."

Clearly, there are advantages to teaching students with such a strong academic orientation. For example, Alan does not need to worry a great deal about the motivation, self-discipline, and basic skills of his College English students.

However, the job of teaching "high achievers" carries its own particular challenges and problems. Alan's students, for example, are quick to pick out even the most trivial mistakes or inaccuracies. During one class, a student interrupted the reading to point out a comma splice in the text of *Crime and Punishment.* Such concern for academic "correctness" can at times be distracting to ongoing instruction. In addition, Alan's students are themselves likely to be working under very high expectations. During the week I observed Alan's class, for example, nine of the twenty-five students were absent for college visitations. This required some accommodations on Alan's part. Material covered that week had to be reviewed upon the students' return.

Journalism

Following College English, Alan teaches two periods of journalism. His journalism students represent a somewhat broader range of ages and academic abilities than do his English students. Close to fifty students (sophomores, juniors, and seniors) take journalism. First-year students work under a contract that requires them to contribute different types of articles to the school

newspaper, act as proofreaders, and assist page editors. Second- and third-year students are assigned jobs on a more flexible basis.

The curriculum for journalism focuses on the production of the school newspaper that is published every other Friday. On Wednesday and Thursday afternoons of a production week, Alan's classroom is filled with busy students typing articles, preparing headlines and photographs, working on page layouts, talking on the phone to advertisers, and proofreading copy. A dozen conversations criss-cross the room as the students hastily put together their next issue. In the midst of this activity Alan can generally be found helping out different groups of students—proofing an article, trying to repair a piece of equipment, or advising students about where they might find information and materials.

Alan acts as a secondary resource person (students are the primary resource people in his journalism classes). When Alan is not needed to "help out," he may run errands, stopping by the main office to check his mail, or going to the department office to get something he has promised a student. Frequently, Alan simply jokes and socializes with the students as they work.

At one point during a journalism class, I looked up from my notes to find that Alan had coaxed several students away from their work and gathered them around him in one corner of the room. Alan stood in front of one student, holding a metal yardstick vertically at arms length. The student held his hands out flat extended about ten inches apart just below the end of the yardstick. Alan dropped the yardstick and the student clapped his hands together, catching the yardstick as it fell. The object of their game was to catch the yardstick as quickly as possible. Other students took turns "testing their reflexes" and joking with each other until they were finally called back to their work. Alan had instigated this game simply as a diversion, an excuse to interact informally with his students.

Alan assumes his most casual role in teaching journalism. He helps a bit with "quality control" by proofing some of the articles, but much of his supervision responsibility has been delegated to the student editors. He gives no formal lectures and makes no assignments of the hand-in-and-return-with-a-grade variety. He is always on hand and is always aware of what the students are doing. He also reads each issue with an evaluative eye after it has gone to press. If the students are behind schedule, the paper may

require some overtime—late Wednesday and Thursday afternoons—but otherwise there are no essays to correct and record, no discussions to prepare, and no "on stage" performances. His aspiration for the school newspaper is that it be of interest to a student readership. To that end, the journalism classes are run primarily by the students.

Acadeca

Alan's final class of the day is Acadeca, the course he team-coaches with Mark Reese. Northway entered the academic decathlon for the first time last year and won the county competition, taking that distinction away from their rival, Parkside High School. Alan's involvement with the course was initiated by a request from the Northway principal. Originally, Alan thought the class would be an interesting coaching experience, plus, as he notes, "It got me out of correcting one more set of essays."

The Acadeca competition, covering topics ranging from economics to fine arts, culminates in a "super quiz," something akin to the old College Bowl programs. During the week I observed the Acadeca class, a majority of the time was spent reviewing material, practicing speeches, and answering sample examination questions. These sample questions included items such as:

- British casualties on the first day of the Battle of Somme num bered a) 30,000; b) 40,000; c) 50,000; d) 60,000; e) 70,000.
- The projection of an acute angle into a plane may be a) a ray; b) a line; c) an obtuse angle; d) an acute angle; e) all of these.
- Which abiotic factor is most important in determining the type of land biome which usually develops in a particular region?
  (1) type of vegetation
  (2) annual rainfall
  (3) rate of photosynthesis
  (4) species of animals.
- Match the following:
  __ "romanticist" using classical forms
  __ made piano recitals fashionable
  __ influenced by Gregorian chant
  __ composed "Parsifal"

__ his work caused a riot in Paris

a. Debussy
b. Brahms
c. Mozart
d. Ravel
e. Stravinsky
f. Liszt
g. Wagner

Both Alan and his coaching partner Mark express mixed feelings about the Acadeca class. On one hand, they enjoy coaching the students and the excitement of intellectual competition. On the other hand, they feel that the Acadeca curriculum has a narrow and limited value. Mark commented one afternoon, "Neither Alan nor I believe that Acadeca is what education is about. Test scores really have nothing to do with education." The Acadeca students, however, do not share this view. Scoring points on the examinations is their primary and, in some cases, only goal. For example, when Alan and Mark proposed a group study session all day Friday, one of the students resisted the idea:

> It's ridiculous for me to tie up my Friday when I study much better alone. At home I can study in three four-hour blocks—four hours in the morning, four hours in the afternoon, and four hours in the evening. Look, I want to get 900 on the exams; that's how I can best help the team.

Alan insisted that the team study together, but this student remained unconvinced that it was an effective strategy.

Teaching Constraints

Alan's work requires him to devote a great deal of time and energy to the practical matters of daily instruction: essays must be collected, read, graded, recorded, and returned; attendance noted at the beginning of each class; novels read and reread; assignments planned; handouts typed and duplicated; and discussion notes reviewed.

These are the practical aspects of "covering the curriculum." "There is always a plan," Alan notes, "Today it was to re-hash the first seventy pages of *Jude the Obscure*. We have certain titles to cover in the course of a semester, and a certain amount of essays to read. There's a timetable."

Meeting these daily responsibilities of teaching is not easy. Alan comments:

> Teaching is fun, but I come home from those first few weeks of school every year and find myself falling asleep at six o'clock, and I wonder why. I mean, I've had jobs in the summers when I've been building houses, working ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week. I could go to bed at ten, get up at six, and work another ten or twelve hours. But, you know, I come back to school and teach five periods, and I'm exhausted.

Although Alan's work makes significant demands on his time and energy, these demands are not simply a function of isolated tasks such as correcting essays, planning curriculum, and conducting lessons. Rather, they are shaped by the context of the school and local community. This context holds particular expectations that arise from the upper-middle-class norms and values of Alan's students. Typically, these norms place a high value on academic achievement. They are most clearly reflected in the emphasis Alan's students place on grades. Alan notes:

> The students are funny about grades. Last year I would give back papers in College Prep English, papers graded one to nine, and then we'd play a little game. Like with Sandy Kahn, a girl who's now at Harvard. I'd come back and say, "What did Mike get on his essay, Sandy?" "Eight." "How many fives did I give, Sandy?" "I think there were six." She knew everyone's grade in that class. She was a running scoreboard of every grade that kids received. I'm not exaggerating; it was phenomenal. She would say, "Well, I only got a seven on this, and I know you gave four eights." She *knew* that, and that made that seven what it was for her.

Preoccupation with grades and academic achievement reflect broader community values that have a direct influence on the curriculum and instruction at Northway. These values are typified in the special status of the academic decathlon program. The Acadeca program is respected both within the school and community. Its high standing within the school is evident simply by the practice of assigning two of Northway's best teachers to coach a small handful of students, an arrangement that represents a significant commitment of school resources. Yet, such a commitment is a prudent investment because the Acadeca program offers the school the promise of highly favorable recognition. Alan describes this situation:

> Last year there was a big hoopla when we won the county

> competition. It was really between two schools, Parkside and Northway. We even had newspapers come out and write up stories on us. It really meant a lot to the school. The administration took it as something tangible showing that the teachers at Northway were doing a good job.
>
> It's silly really; you take six kids out of 1,600, ask 'em fifty questions, and people take that as some indication about how well we're doing. On the Monday morning after we won, God it was funny, just like getting a phone call from the President of the United States. The assistant superintendent gets me on the phone and says, "Alan? I've got Bob on the line, hold on." And the superintendent comes on the line, "Mr. Hargrove, I just wanted to congratulate you...." I mean it was crazy, like winning the Olympics. I talked to some guy down here at the store who said, "Oh yeah, I'd like to get my kids into Northway. I understand it's a great school. I heard you won the decathlon."

I returned to visit Alan's classes on the Monday following the Acadeca team's county competition. During fourth period, Mark Reese interrupted Alan's class to inform him that their team had again won the competition. At lunch, several of Alan's colleagues congratulated him on their victory. A mathematics teacher asked about the team's math scores, and the social studies department chair was anxious to know the team's scores in history and economics. These teachers knew that such scores would reflect on their professional status within the district. When the social studies chair asked about the team's performance, Alan answered in a cautionary tone: "You know these scores really don't mean anything." He responded, "The people at the district office don't know that." Alan cringed with embarrassment in response to his colleague's Machiavellian attitude. Later Alan explained to me, "He is just trying to make capital on this. You really can't blame him. Teachers receive so little recognition."

During sixth period, the Acadeca students were ecstatic with the news of their victory. They immediately began to plan strategies for the state competition, which would be held in six weeks. One student enthusiastically suggested that they go to the state competition and "kick ass," an expression which had recently been made popular by George Bush. To the team's surprise, Alan offered a far more subdued yet firm suggestion: "We've worked hard and need a break. Let's just forget about Acadeca for at least a week or so."

While the special status and popularity of the academic decathlon program reflect the strong values placed on academic achievement by the Northway community, these values are communicated to the teachers at Northway High School in many ways. At times, Northway parents express their concerns directly. Two years ago, for example, the Northway English department drew up a proposal to restructure the English curriculum. Many of the English teachers, particularly the department chair, had put in a great deal of time and effort reviewing the curriculum and developing proposed changes. Among these changes, the number of honors classes would be reduced. Before their proposal was presented to the school board, Northway teachers were requested to meet with a group of parents who had expressed concern about the new curriculum. Alan attended one of these meetings, which he describes:

> The parents had mobilized—it was essentially the college community parents. They came armed to the meeting, bringing with them a couple of university English professors. First they proceeded to tell us that *everything* was wrong. Primarily the main thing was honors, "how are our kids competing with kids from other schools," and "you're going to penalize our kids because they don't get the weighted grading in the college system," you know that whole business. Anyway, the date was nearing for our presentation to the school board. This was our regular year to review the curriculum, and we got word that the parents had collected a petition with 250 signatures on it. Now at Northway, one parent complains and it's a crisis, so 250 is *really* something.

At this point, the English teachers compromised by reinstating some of the honors courses. The parents, however, continued to criticize changes that they felt might "lower standards." They were led by one particularly vocal parent, Ms. Simpson. The teachers then met with the school principal, Brian Fader, who offered his support to the English department. Nevertheless, continued pressure from the Northway parents affected Alan strongly enough for him to write a letter to the principal. It reads:

> May 18, 1985
>
> Brian:
>
> I wanted to put into writing some of my thoughts regarding "The

Simpson Affair" and its effect on me personally. I see no need for anonymity; please feel free to share part or all of this with whoever might be interested.

Unlike some of my colleagues in the English Department, I have not to this point been "enraged" by the antics of Simpson and company. I was, in fact, initially delighted by the fact that so many people seemed to have genuine concern about what happens to the English program at Northway High School. Nor do I consider myself and my colleagues the sole depository of wisdom as regards what is right and wrong in the teaching of high school English; I am more than willing to listen and respond to the concerns, ideas, and questions of Northway parents.

When it comes to Ms. Simpson and friends, however, it must by now be clear to all but the most obtuse that after the English Department has listened carefully to this group and after careful deliberation has modified its program in response to those of their concerns which seemed legitimate, it is the height of fatuity to ask a group of experienced and knowledgeable professionals to make further accommodations. On the one occasion that I spoke with Ms. Simpson I found her to be a rather pleasant woman, and I would like to be able to be charitable toward her, but I am finding it increasingly difficult not to believe that she has some ulterior motive in what seems, unfortunately, a vendetta against the Northway English Department. I don't know if Ms. Simpson is simply a bit unstable or perhaps merely enjoys the excitement of a good "crusade," but I have come to doubt very seriously the genuineness of her concerns.

I asked you at yesterday's meeting to convey to the Board of Education the depth of feeling in the English Department regarding this whole affair. As a measure of my personal feeling, I want you to know that if at this point the English Department is coerced into making further substantive modification in its program, I would consider this an utter repudiation of my professional judgment. Were this to happen, I would request a transfer to Greene or Campbell for the 1983-4 school year; were a transfer not possible, I would request a leave of absence; were a leave not possible, I would resign from my teaching position.

I think you know me well enough, Brian, to realize that I do not intend the last paragraph as any kind of threat. We both know that any teacher's resignation would be met with indifference by

most and delight by some. I simply see such action as the only means that would be available to me to salvage what little self-respect the treatment of teachers during the last eight or so years has left me.

I want to thank you for the support you offered the department yesterday. I think we deserve that support, and I urge you to "educate" any administrators or board members who think otherwise.

Sincerely,

Alan Hargrove

The school principal and several district administrators cautiously supported the English department's proposals. On their recommendation, the school board ultimately approved these proposed changes, promising the parents "continued review" of the English program at Northway. Alan feels satisfied with how "The Simpson Affair" turned out. He views the action taken by the district and school board as a show of support for Northway teachers. Nevertheless, this incident illustrates the degree to which such school/community conflict has influenced Alan's professional life.

Teaching Strategies

Alan has developed a number of strategies that allow him to cope with the demands of teaching at Northway. This section focuses on two general strategies: one in response to community pressures, the other in response to the task demands of his work.

Balancing Priorities

The first strategy might be described as "keeping academics in perspective." The aim of this strategy is to avoid a very narrow definition of schooling—one that views education strictly in terms of preparing for the future. The overriding ambition of Alan's students is to be accepted into "the college of their choice." They believe that obtaining this goal is dependent on a highly competitive process that recognizes achievement in terms of

academic distinction—grades, test scores, and "rigorous" preparation in high school. The name of the game is taking the right classes and learning what teachers expect.

Alan tries to resist this view of education. He says he was motivated to go into teaching partly because his own high school days were a positive social and personal, as well as academic, experience. Alan's strategy as a teacher is to maintain a relaxed and casual classroom atmosphere, one intended to foster personal, social, and academic learning. His approach to classroom instruction is *rigorous*, yet playful. I often observed Alan good-naturedly push students "off-task," as if to remind them that they were high school adolescents, not Byzantine monks. Most high school students may not need such reminders, but Alan's particular students do. When I asked Alan what he sees as the most difficult problems facing his students, he commented:

> I suppose just the pressure to do well, the competitiveness to do well academically. And most students handle it remarkably well. One of the reasons for my whole casual approach, which I hope you've witnessed, is I'm really trying to minimize that. Competitiveness has the obvious problems—cheating, which happens much more often than any of us want to think about, and just making some of them into little old ladies and men before they're eighteen. Someone could come into my classroom and say, "This is frivolous; what you do is frivolous," and that would be my defense, that it seems to me to be a very necessary counter to the deathly atmosphere that can so often take place in a situation with tense and competitive kids.

Providing a rigorous program for college preparation represents one set of priorities—priorities that receive strong support from the community. Such priorities focus on *what* students learn and how it will serve them in the future. Providing opportunities for social and interpersonal development represents another set of priorities. These priorities focus on *how* students learn. Alan is able to define his work to include both academic and interpersonal concerns. This balance of priorities, however, requires a second strategy, one that allows Alan to cope with limited resources.

Diversifying the Teaching Schedule

This second strategy is in response to the practical demands

of teaching English. Alan copes with these demands by accepting responsibilities that help diversify his schedule. This strategy is somewhat of a contradiction, yet Alan has learned that new responsibilities offer him an opportunity to define the daily requirements of his teaching. For example, by accepting responsibility for the school newspaper and the academic decathlon program, Alan is left with only two English classes for which he must grade essays and prepare lessons. Compared with Alan's English classes, his responsibilities in journalism and Acadeca can be managed with greater flexibility. For example, journalism and Acadeca typically require less preparation time than is required in teaching English. It is easier for Alan to correct 55 essays (two class sets) and "coach" his other three classes than it would be for him to correct 140 essays (five class sets) without the additional coaching responsibilities. The net result of this strategy is a more reasonable workload and more time that Alan can devote to improving the quality of his instruction. He comments:

> I very reluctantly agreed to take journalism, but that has been *absolute* salvation for me. I'm not sure I could teach five periods of English again. Well, yes I could do it, but I would certainly be a less effective teacher. I find myself doing things now where I can go out of class and say to myself, "Gosh, I really could have explained that better," and then I realize: God, if I had five periods, I couldn't even think about things that subtle or refined. There are times when you're teaching five periods that the goal is to survive the day. I think it's a luxury to be able to say, "OK, well that worked pretty well, but next time I can do it better." Many teachers who have five periods of English don't have that luxury. So, it makes me a better teacher; I'm absolutely certain of that.

The two strategies described above help to strengthen and enhance the quality of teaching that Alan provides his students. What might we learn from these teaching strategies? Alan's first strategy is aimed at getting students to recognize that their educational experience involves more than grades, test scores, and completed assignments. This is a valuable lesson, regardless of whether or not it will help Alan's students get into the college of their choice. This strategy also holds an important lesson for evaluating what teachers do. Alan's students are so wrapped up in academics that they need someone like Alan to occasionally push them "off-task." Yet, this same strategy would clearly be

counterproductive with less academically oriented students. Simply stated, what makes sense in one teaching situation may not make sense in another; the hallmarks of effective teaching are flexibility and perceptiveness, the ability to recognize what is appropriate in a given context, and not some prespecified list of teaching behaviors.

Alan's second strategy, one that helps to diversify his teaching schedule, is an example of a general theme—that less can be more. By teaching fewer English classes, Alan is able to provide a higher quality of instruction. This is an important strategy, because it demonstrates how a creative and flexible approach to "the daily schedule" can yield work situations that favor teaching improvement. Would it be possible to provide teachers with more opportunities for them to define their own teaching responsibilities? Alan's experience suggests that such efforts promise more reflective and enriched classroom instruction.

Support for Teaching

Alan derives a good deal of satisfaction from his success in the classroom. Yet he is also deeply concerned about the declining professional support he and his colleagues at Northway have received over the past two decades. He comments:

> Twenty years ago this was a really exciting place. We called it Camelot—new school, money for anything we wanted, people coming from all over the country to see this model campus in a lighthouse district where anytime we needed something there'd be a tax bond issue and we'd have the money. People never voted against education. Of course, that's all changed. We had to virtually go on strike this year to get a barely acceptable contract. For once we'll maybe almost catch up with inflation. This might be the first time in fifteen years that we haven't actually taken a pay cut in terms of purchasing power. That's a literal fact. Can you imagine anything that you really thought important in this society where you would take a lawyer, a doctor, a business executive, or auto mechanic and say, "Look, you get better, you work hard at this for twenty years and get better, and twenty years from now I'll make sure that your workload is increased by at least thirty percent, and I'll make sure that your pay is about twenty-five percent less." Can you imagine doing that? In how many jobs in this country does the

> situation get worse the longer you work. The better you do, and the longer you work at it, the worse your situation gets, because that's exactly what's happened to teachers.

We would like to believe that individual teachers somehow find rewards in the classroom that shield them from the impact of fiscal retrenchment and declining public support. Yet this lack of support deprives Alan of professional satisfaction and may ultimately undermine his personal commitment to teaching.

Chapter 3

A Case Study of Professional Isolation: Peter Karlin

I'd say my teaching has changed tremendously. Looking back, I had a very difficult time with students when I first started. I always believed in *very* strict discipline. I probably overreacted, probably a little bit afraid that I couldn't control things. So, rather than lose control, I'd "kill" anybody that even breathed heavily. I used all sorts of psychological violence on the students. If someone was talking in class, I'd say, "Would you please stand up. Everybody give so-and-so a hand. He seems to want all the attention...." I would just crucify them with that kind of sarcastic viciousness.

I've never really hit anyone physically, but I have psychologically beat students up. They use to call me "The Colonel." That was my nickname. I went in with the idea that this is *my* classroom, and *you* conform to the rules. I'd use the word "policy" until it was coming out of my ears. I applied the policies fairly, but they were extremely strict—strict to the point where if anybody said even one word during an exam, I didn't care who they were talking to, the exam was destroyed and they got an F. Some kids didn't graduate because of that.

I don't think I'm really less strict, but it's a different approach. About ten or fifteen years ago, and I think this was a key, I went to an adult class, substituting for a friend of mine who had asked me to take one of his night classes. I realized that I acted completely different. In the adult class, I was relaxed and laughing and talking. Somebody would come up and say, "If I had another day to work on this, I could do a better job," and I'd say, "Go ahead, it's worth the extra time." I'd talk to them like an adult, but I would never say something like that to a high school student. I'd be sarcastic and say, "Is it ready or not? Hand it in a day late, and I'll take off ten percent. It's your choice." So I realized that I was treating the high school students differently than I was the older adults, and there was only three or four years difference.

So I changed slowly over a period of quite a few years. It's still

going on. I still haven't shucked all that out of my system, but I think any kind of violence like that—verbal, psychological, or emotional—all that comes from the teacher's fear of losing control, insecurity that you don't know your subject matter, fear that a student is going to ask a question you can't answer.

The violence and pressure and even the threat, "I'm going to call your parents," all those things are protective devices. I used to write out everything, all the questions I was going to ask, trying to figure out what reaction I was going to get from the kids. Now I don't. I just go in with the material I'm going to cover; I ad-lib a lot, and when I make a mistake, I laugh. If something comes up that the students like, I go with it. I have a tendency to trust the students more. I tell them, "Please don't push me into a corner where I have to act like a teacher, and I won't push you into a corner where you have to act like a student."

Now I'm more relaxed, but I still have vocabulary, and I still have writing assignments, and I still have literature assignments, and I still have paragraph work. I mean, all of those things are still there, but I have a tendency to go with the flow a little bit more. If I decide that this is not going to work with a particular class, or if the timing isn't good, I can change it or modify things. I'm not so worried that if my idea doesn't get across, then the day is lost forever—that kind of thing. I really believe that most of the teaching comes from the students anyway, that kids learn more from kids. So, the big thing in my class is that people can speak honestly and with respect for each other's opinions.

Peter Karlin has taught English for a total of twenty-six years, the last twenty-two of which have been at Clawson High School. Before deciding to teach, Peter's ambitions were to become a priest. It was not until after several years of college that his interests shifted from religion to education. Eventually he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and philosophy. Then, after serving twenty-two months in the military, Peter returned to college and completed his teaching credentials in secondary education. He began teaching at the age of twenty-four. His decision to enter teaching as a profession was influenced partly by his respect for previous teachers, and partly by his early commitment to some type of service occupation.

Currently Peter teaches five classes: two advanced classes for freshmen (English 9A), and three advanced classes for juniors

(English 11A). The "advanced" designation is used at Clawson simply to identify courses designed for students who are "average and above." After graduation, a slim majority of Peter's students will continue their education, most at a local community or junior college. Peter's curriculum is aimed at college preparation and general literacy. Course content is defined broadly. Topics cover American and British literature, poetry, creative and expository writing, vocabulary, and grammar. What is it like to teach these classes on a day-to-day basis?

Daily Routines

Peter arrives at Clawson at 7:30 Monday morning. His first stop is the faculty lounge where he quietly smokes his pipe, thinks through his day, and reviews his lesson plans. On scraps of paper he jots down notes to himself: "Have freshmen finish Victory Spring," "make journal assignment," "introduce next reading," "review Self-Reliance." Peter walks to his classroom ten minutes before the beginning of first period. His room is barely large enough to hold thirty-six student desks, a row of bookcases, and a set of file cabinets. The bookcases line one wall to the west, blackboards are located on the north and south walls, and seven rectangular windows run horizontally across the top of the east wall. The right-hand side windows are placed just above the classroom's only door.

Peter's first-period students, thirty freshmen, arrive shortly before eight o'clock. Peter comments to a boy who sits down in the last row and rests his head on the desk top, "You look sleepy this morning, George." "Uh?" the student replies, "Yeah, it's eight o'clock." As the students settle down, Peter takes roll and then addresses the class:

> Good morning. I hope you all had a nice, peaceful weekend. This morning I wanted to give you a few minutes to finish the reading we worked on Friday. There'll be a quiz in, say, fifteen minutes. So, if you haven't finished the story, you'll need to get right to work.

As Peter talks, he distributes anthologies that contain the short story "Victory Spring." The students open their books and read silently.

Peter's students are unpretentious in their appearance. They

wear Levi and corduroy jeans, sweat shirts, football jerseys, running shoes, and inexpensive cowboy boots. The boys wear jackets of lightweight fabric and digital watches with black plastic watchbands. The girls wear knit sweaters, brightly colored pullovers, and loose-fitting smocks. Their casual dress matches their behavior. They are at home in the classroom. A girl with dark hair sitting in the second row yawns and stretches both arms high over her head, then leans back slowly bringing her hands down behind her until they lightly come to rest on top of the student's head directly behind her. With her arms stretched back, the girl gently pats her friend on top of the head three times, and then quickly brings her hands back over her own head and places them on the desk in front of her. Her friend smiles without looking up from her textbook. The boy sitting in front of them slouches in his chair and takes out a pair of mirrored sunglasses. He holds the glasses in front of him, peers at his own reflection, combs his hair, and then returns his attention to the open textbook on his desk.

Peter spends about fifteen minutes talking with individual students about makeup assignments, grades, and homework. Then he goes to the blackboard and writes down a list of twenty vocabulary words. At his desk, he picks up his copy of the textbook and announces to the class:

> Ok, your time's up. The quiz is short-answer. Put your names on top of your papers, and underneath your name write down whether or not you finished the story. Question number one: Who is the main character?...Question number two: How does the author describe the weather at the beginning of the story?...Question number three: The family in this story faces a number of problems; name two of these problems. Question number four: How many children are there in the family?...Question number five: How old is the oldest child?...

The phone rings, and Peter answers it:

> Yes, this is Mr. Karlin....I'm sorry, I can't hear you. What was the first name again?.... She's in my third period, no, my fourth period; I'm not sure. Who am I talking to?...She's not here. You've got the wrong teacher. This is Mr. Karlin....Ok.... Ok...

Peter hangs up and continues with the quiz. His questions are taken from notes he has written in the margins of his textbook. They are not "higher order" questions. Most of them only require

the students to recall factual information. However, each question is related to some aspect of the story on which Peter hopes to focus the students' attention. After reading the final question, he announces:

> Ok, please correct your own papers. First question: Who is the main character? [some students answer "the mother," other students answer "the son."] Ok, the son is the narrator—he's the one who's telling us the story. We see the action take place through his eyes. What do we know about the son? [several students comment] Ok, we know his name and how old he is. What do we know about the mother? [again, students comment] So, we know a lot about the mother, don't we? Even though the story is told from the son's perspective, we find out most about the mother. She's really the central figure, the person we learn more about than the other characters.

The answers to each question are discussed not simply as a matter of what is correct and incorrect, but rather as an opportunity to explore how particular aspects of the story demonstrate the literary uses of perspective, setting, theme, and character development. Thus, Peter uses the quiz as a pretense for class discussion. After they have discussed each question, Peter asks the students to add up their scores and pass their papers forward. While they complete this task, he writes on the blackboard:

Audience desired: _____	Form (15) _____
Tone: _____	Appeal to Audience (15) _____
	Tone successful (10) _____
Devices attempted:	Mechanics (SS/CAP) (20) _____
_____	Devices (15) _____ _____ _____
_____	
_____	

Peter then turns and comments to the class:

> Ok, here's the grading criteria for the ballads due tomorrow. I

> hope you worked on 'em over the weekend. Is seventy-five points too much for this assignment? What do you want me to cut down?

The students disagree; several suggest that "mechanics" be reduced from twenty to ten points, others suggest that "form" be reduced or eliminated altogether. Peter calls for a vote by show of hands, and mechanics is reduced to ten points. A student then asks how long their ballads "have to be," and Peter replies:

> I think we decided on five stanzas. If you have questions, I'll be at my desk. You've got ten minutes before the end of class; now don't waste it. Make sure you have the vocabulary words copied off the board, or work on your ballads.

As Peter talks to the class, he collects student papers and then walks back to his desk. Several students approach him with questions about their assignment: "What can I write about?" "Can the tone be sad?" "Can this be about something that's not true, like a fairy tale?" Other students show Peter drafts of their work, yet he has little time to respond to their writing. At 8:50 the bell ends first period.

Peter and I walk out into the open hallway as the students change rooms. I ask him if he is responsible for monitoring the halls between classes, and he answers:

> I think we are supposed to stand out here, but I come out just to get away from those four walls for a few minutes. I get to feeling a bit closed in if I spend all morning in the room.

Second period Peter teaches English 11A. Before class gets under way, a student approaches Peter at his desk and hands him a "transfer form" that Peter signs and returns to the student. Then Peter crosses out the student's name in his roll book. He later explained that the student was transferring to another school: "She wasn't here very long. It was one of those cases where the student wanted to get away from home for awhile. So, she came down here to live with her father temporarily." In Peter's roll book for second period, seven names have been crossed out and four names added indicating "adds" and "drops" for the first three months of the school year. The most recent student to check out leaves Peter with a second-period enrollment of twenty-nine juniors.

Peter's first task during second period is to arrange his

attendance cards, which will be picked up by a student helper from the main office shortly after nine o'clock. As Peter sorts through his cards, a second student comes up to ask if he would like to have a "free puppy." Peter diplomatically declines the student's offer, they talk casually for a few moments (during which time Peter forgets to finish sorting his attendance cards), then he walks to the front of the room and addresses the class:

> I hope you all had a pleasant weekend. Will everyone please take out their journals. Your assignment due today was to rate yourself on any criteria that you feel is important. I'd like you to share with the rest of us some of what you've written. Now, I usually don't put you under the gun. Usually I call on you only if you raise your hand first, but, unfortunately, we don't hear from everyone if we do it that way. To counteract that, I'd like to just go around the room and have each of you read your passages. But if you really feel under pressure, you can pass.

"Now everyone will pass," a student observes, "and you'll be right back where you started." "Oh, I have more faith in the class than that," Peter responds. The students take turns reading from their journals. Only two students in the class accept Peter's option to pass. As they read, the class is interrupted three separate times: once by the student helper collecting attendance cards, and twice by phone calls from the main office. Both calls are to locate students "needed" by a school counselor or administrator.

During the time I observed Peter, it was unusual for him to teach a lesson without being interrupted at least once by phone calls from the main office. The telephone in Peter's classroom is built into the wall adjacent a set of bookcases. It does not have a dial, and cannot be used to call out. At lunch one day I mentioned to Peter that I had recorded in my notes six phone interruptions during his first four classes. He responded, "I know; it's a real pain, but who should I complain to? All those calls were from different people. I guess I could come down on the office secretaries, but that would only make their lives miserable."

After the students have finished reading from their journals, Peter moves on to a new assignment:

> Title your next entry, "Hard Times." For this assignment, I'd like you to write about a time in your life that was difficult for you, some incident or problem. Now, this is a tough one. Don't try to plan, just write as the ideas come. Think of it as just

writing in the mud—something to be washed away. Describe how you felt, your reaction to something that happened. How did you feel? Did you feel guilt? Did you feel anger? Did you feel frustration? The most important thing is just to get something down on paper. If you can't think of a really bad time, think of a time when you just felt tense or upset about something. Be flexible. Writing is like drawing a picture; the best ideas come from the least likely places, but you need to be open. Let me give you an example about a time that was very difficult in my own life. It was when I learned that my son was involved with drugs.

Peter continues with a story about his son's drug problem and the tensions this created within his family. The example Peter has chosen is highly personal. He describes his son's addiction and his own feelings first of anger, and then of frustration. He speaks with a quiet intensity in his voice. The students are attentive and curious. In the middle of the story, the classroom door suddenly swings open and there stands a young boy with a surprised and confused expression on his face. Recognition immediately overtakes the boy's confusion and he mumbles, "Oh....wrong class ....sorry." The door closes as quickly as it opened, yet the intensity of Peter's story is already lost. He concludes by noting briefly, "Well, anyway, I'm sure you get the idea."

As the students then put away their journals, Peter distributes a class set of American literature textbooks, and writes on the blackboard:

Over-soul
Nature
Individual
Mysticism
Optimism
Didacticism
Intuition

Then Peter briefly defines each of these words and asks the class:

Ok, what movement in literature do we associate with these words? [no response] Doesn't anyone have any idea? [still no response] Ok, Ok, the term I was looking for is transcendentalism. Turn to page 225. Today we'll begin Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance." This reading is related to the journal assignment you shared with us today. As we read the first part, I want you to think about three questions: First, what do you

value most in yourself? Second, what do you value most in others? And third, how do you spend your time, or like to spend your time?

Peter reads aloud from his copy of the textbook, frequently stopping in order to comment, ask questions, give examples, and ask students for examples from their own experience:

"These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs." Ok, Emerson is saying something here about compromise and tolerance. Can anyone think of compromises that you make in your own life?

A few students respond to Peter's questions by offering examples and comments, but most of the students seem confused and uncertain. They glance hesitantly first at their books, then at Peter, then back to their books, raising their eyebrows and impatiently watching the clock. Peter stops reading and asks, "How long have I got?" "Three minutes," a student responds. "Ok, we'll pick this up tomorrow. Emerson's language is difficult, but we'll take it slowly, step-by-step. Let me collect the books."

The bell ends second period at 9:50. Again Peter and I walk out into the open hallway and stand to one side as the students hurry back and forth between their classes. Peter and I discuss second period:

Peter: That reading in class didn't go well. Only a few students got anything out of it. "Self-Reliance" is a difficult essay to teach. Maybe third and fourth period I'll just let them read on their own today, and we'll discuss it tomorrow. I'm really not sure what to do. This is something they should read at home and prepare questions.

David: Have you always been in this situation? I mean not having books the students can take home with them.

Peter: No, no, this is the first year they haven't had their own books. The department ordered new books last year, but they

won't be here 'til December. I could dig up seventy copies of the old book, the text we're using now, but I have ninety-five juniors.

David: What are you going to do?

Peter: About what?

David: About your next class?

Peter: Oh, I'll ask the students what they want to do. I used to rely much more on planning. Now I believe in the moment, what actually happens in the classroom. Things will work out. If the students aren't responding to something, then I'll move on.

As we talk, a student wearing a blue windbreaker, white jeans, and red basketball shoes comes up to Peter and apologizes for missing second period. "I'm in Miss Azar's play," the student explains. Peter asks him to come in after school in order to get the journal assignment made in his absence. As the student hurries off, Peter and I walk back into the classroom. Third and fourth periods Peter teaches English 11A, the same course that he teaches during second period. He regards these three classes as "one preparation." Thus, class activities during second period mirror those during third and fourth. As in second period, third and fourth period students read aloud passages from their journals, Peter makes the writing assignment on "Hard Times," and the class begins reading "Self-Reliance."

Between fourth period and sixth period, Peter has a twenty-five minute break for lunch and one free period for class preparation. Peter eats lunch in the faculty lunchroom. Rarely does he sit or talk with other teachers during lunch. On days when the weather is clear, he sometimes walks to the park across the street and sketches. Later in the week, Peter brought in a notebook of his sketches for me to look at. They were landscape drawings of buildings, houses, trees, and low rolling hills. I asked Peter if he ever included people in the scenery he chose to draw. He shook his head no. On Friday Peter commented that he had missed his "quiet time" during lunch and fifth period—a sacrifice he had made in order to accommodate my constant companionship that week.

Peter likes to spend fifth period, his preparation period, working in the faculty lounge. This room, to Peter's continual

frustration, is not always available because the school administration often makes use of it for a variety of special purposes. During the week, the lounge was not available on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday because the principal had temporarily assigned it to the school's drama club as a makeshift dressing room.

Peter's first priorities during his preparation period are to reread materials he intends to cover in class and plan assignments for the upcoming week. If he has any time left, he corrects student essays or works on clerical tasks such as bringing his roll book up-to-date or filling out absence slips. Peter describes these clerical tasks as "boring, boring, boring," and notes:

> Keeping track of attendance and all that business is a pain in the neck. If I wanted, I could get a student assistant to do it, but then I wouldn't know what's going on—which students are cutting class, which students are excused, and who needs to make up work.

During sixth period Peter teaches English 9A, the same course he teaches first period. As with his English 11A classes, Peter regards his 9A classes as one preparation. Thus, the basic pattern of classroom activities during first period are repeated during sixth period. On Monday, the sixth-period students finish "Victory Spring," Peter gives a reading quiz (using the same questions he used in first period), he writes on the board the same twenty vocabulary words for the students to copy, and he negotiates grading criteria for the ballads the students are writing.

By the end of sixth period, Peter's final class of the day, he has seen approximately one hundred and fifty students. Peter stays in his classroom for twenty to thirty minutes after sixth period to talk with individual students who stop by with questions about their assignments, grades, and homework. Then Peter walks down to the faculty lounge were he corrects student essays or works on his lesson plans. "I just stay until the work's done," he notes, "That usually takes about two hours."

Work Constraints and Teaching Strategies

Viewed "up close," Peter's work often seems like a collage of loosely related behaviors and social interactions that occupy his attention from moment to moment. However, the fluidity of these

interactions is regulated by strategies Peter has developed in response to various aspects of classroom teaching. This section explores work strategies related to the curriculum Peter teaches, his relationship with colleagues, and his relationship with students.

Curriculum Management

What Peter teaches is determined by a broad constellation of factors such as student and community expectations, constraints on his time, the availability of textbooks, and how Peter perceives the particular needs of his students. One of Peter's primary concerns is that his resources, especially the time available for planning and instruction, are inadequate given the scope of his curriculum. He notes:

> We used to have separate courses—one for world literature, one for creative writing, one for college skills, and so on. Then they threw all that out and put everything into one course. It's pretty discouraging trying to force all this grammar, all this composition, all this literature, and coordinating it all with a curriculum guide that's four inches thick. It's horrendous. This is our second year with the curriculum guide, and everyone says, "Well, you don't have to teach exactly what's in the guide." But it's *there*; it hangs over your head. I try to make my teaching meaningful. I try to teach not only what students are supposed to know, but also things that will make 'em good people, well-rounded individuals, thoughtful, and all that. But it's difficult. I'm still adjusting to having it all put into one course. It's easy to go in and teach essay writing; it's easy to go in and teach vocabulary or sentence building. But now I have to put the creative writing with the essay writing, with the vocabulary, with the mechanics, and with American and English literature. English literature alone would normally take a whole year to cover anyway. Everything suffers. I've had to water everything down, and skip things. I think the administrators are trying to simplify their scheduling program, and this makes artificial demands on the teachers. So, for the sake of a computer and for the sake of administrators, they destroyed what I thought was a good program. Now it's the teacher's job to coordinate all the material.

Such curricular demands have a far-reaching impact on

Peter's work. To cope with these demands, he has developed a number of routines aimed at "curriculum management." Examples include Peter's point system for grading student essays, his use of short-answer reading quizzes, and the patterned repetition of instructional activities from one class to another. These work routines allow Peter to "process information" or "cover material" in an efficient manner. Routines of planning and instruction are important survival strategies, yet curriculum management offers little in the way of intellectual satisfaction.

One reason high school teachers enter the profession stems from their devotion to a particular discipline. They hope to find in teaching opportunities to further develop their learning in the field for which they have been trained. However, the job of curriculum management often preempts such opportunities. For example, on Friday I asked Peter what he planned to do over the weekend. He responded:

> Well, I hope to have time to do a little bit of reading. I have an old friend who sent me a book. He used to teach years ago, but now he's a gardener in San Francisco. Anyway, three weeks ago he sent me a book on Thoreau's essays that I haven't yet had time to even open.

This was the only time I heard Peter, or any of his colleagues at Clawson High School, mention an activity specifically aimed to further their subject matter knowledge, and it is ironic that this isolated instance was initiated by someone who had already left the teaching profession.

If anything, Peter's work discourages him from becoming intellectually engaged with what he teaches. It does so because curriculum management is a never-ending task. There is always more that could be "covered" if time allowed. Planning assignments, preparing quizzes, and correcting student essays are all activities that expand to meet whatever resources are available. The task of managing these curriculum activities thus leaves little time for Peter to pursue his own intellectual development.

Isolation from Colleagues

Curricular demands combine with institutional norms to shape Peter's relationship with his colleagues. This relationship is most readily characterized by personal and professional isola-

tion. "The teachers here don't really talk to one another," Peter reports; "they don't have time." The daily routines of Peter's work focus his attention on planning lessons, interacting with students, and correcting essays. Because these tasks persistently consume so much time and energy, neither Peter nor his fellow teachers have much opportunity to build collegial ties. Furthermore, because teachers spend a majority of their day in close interaction with students, it is hardly surprising if they do not seek out additional interpersonal contact outside the classroom.

Isolation is a strategy well designed to conserve Peter's time as well as his physical and emotional energy. Peter was active in his local teachers' association early in his career, but as he notes, "I gave that up when I realized that it did nothing to help my teaching." In the long run, isolationism may not be a productive strategy, yet it is one necessitated by the immediate demands of Peter's work.

Peter's relationship with school administrators is also characterized by isolation. During the entire week I shadowed Peter, he spoke with the school principal only once—a conversation that took place in the hallway between classes. Peter initiated their brief exchange to complain about the drama club taking over the faculty lounge.

As institutions, schools are not designed to encourage teacher/administrator interaction. Peter has only one formal opportunity to talk with school administrators about his work. This opportunity is offered by teacher evaluations, a process Peter goes through once every two to three years. This process, however, does not seem an opportunity for genuine dialogue. Peter comments:

> They say the purpose of the evaluation is for an administrator to make suggestions on how we can improve our teaching, but I've never had an administrator make any suggestions. I think the real reason we're evaluated is that the district requires the school to do it.

Peter's feelings toward district administrators are less benign than his relationship with school administrators. He describes them as "rigid, inflexible, condescending, paternalistic, cowardly, weak, superficial, insincere, misinformed, conniving, unprincipled, and offensive." His hostility, at least in part, is maintained by the hierarchical rigidity of the bureaucracy within which Peter

works. This organizational structure not only isolates teachers but also limits opportunities for individual recognition. Peter taught in a small Catholic school early in his career. He describes this experience in relation to teaching at Clawson:

> I got married during my first year at the Catholic school and told the principal there that I couldn't afford to continue teaching at such a low salary. So, he gave me a $2,000 raise. When my first child was born, they gave me a bonus. I really felt like I was wanted there, but nothing like that could happen in a public school. There's just no way to give teachers individual recognition. Once in a while a coach or maybe a drama teacher will get recognition, but never the math teacher who's teaching first-year math to ninth graders, and, hell, they work the hardest!

I asked Peter what could be done to promote better collegial relations between teachers and administrators at Clawson. He replied:

> The first thing is that we've got to get together outside of school. We would have to get together in a situation where we're able to look at each other not as teacher and administrator, but as people. So, the first thing is geographic location, and the second thing is a condition in which status and hierarchy have no importance. It would have to be a bit casual and let us interact on a one-to-one basis. It can't be structured like things are here. Something like a week at the beach or backpacking, somewhere where we can see each other in our pajamas.

What does Peter hope to gain by getting away from the school? First, he hopes to escape the daily demands of his work, and thus free time for interacting with his colleagues. Time, a scarce commodity in the teacher's day-to-day work, is perhaps the most basic prerequisite for collaboration. Second, Peter hopes to escape the formal roles of "teacher" and "administrator," roles that constrain as well as define relationships. As Peter notes, "Relationships here at the school have a way of freezing up."

Negotiation with Students

Isolation, although a dominant aspect of Peter's work, is not at issue in the classroom. The classroom is not a bureaucracy, and isolation is not a viable work strategy. Peter works face-to-face with students on a daily basis, and this requires a great deal of

interpersonal negotiation between teacher and student. If the metaphor of "manager" best describes Peter's relationship with curriculum, then the metaphor of "negotiator" best describes his relationship with students. All negotiators, whether they work in a conference room or a classroom, have at least two basic concerns. First, they need to maintain some type of "working" relationship with whom they negotiate. If this relationship is severed, opportunities for negotiation are lost. Peter comments on this aspect of his work:

> The most difficult decision I have to make is to remove a kid from the classroom, because for me it's accepting the fact that you can't work with the student, that there's something between you and the student that prevents your teaching—something in you, or in the student, or in the circumstances.

A second basic concern for negotiators is to cultivate relationships that foster open communication and trust. This concern is central to Peter's work. When I asked him what practical advice he would offer a beginning teacher, Peter offered these suggestions:

> The first thing to learn is to treat the student as a person, with the same respect you would an adult. Another thing would be to try to maintain the attitude that your class is not their only class, and that the students have different values than yours. Also, trust the students, and never criticize or threaten a student so that you destroy the relationship to the point where it can't be recovered. Never say anything to a student that will cause a serious break between you and him, and *you* should take the first steps toward correcting a problem with a student. That's part of treating students as people. If a student comes in upset, give them the benefit of being upset. They have bad days too.
>
> I think you should care about students. I don't think you should be their personal friend, but you should be on a friendly basis with them. You can't force students to do what you want them to do, but if they know you're working hard and care about 'em, then from there on it's gravy....
>
> Definitely be aware of the students' lives outside of the classroom, and treat them as more than just an English student. I would also say not to be afraid of letting students know in as many ways as you can that you're a person and that you have a

> life outside the classroom. You also have to be aware that students do the same things that you did when you were in school. For instance, you loved to have the teacher forget to collect an assignment. Have the sense of humor to realize that those things are still going on.
>
> Also, use the least amount of pressure that you can. If you have to call a parent, tell the kid you're going to do it, but don't threaten them. And when you call a parent, you want to set up a situation where it's going to be a constructive rather than destructive thing at home. You don't want the parent to put the phone down and go over and hit his kid; you want him to go over and talk to his kid. Another thing is to never talk about a student outside of the classroom. There should be integrity in the classroom. I tell the kids that I don't talk about 'em outside of the room, and they really appreciate that.

Peter's "practical" advice focuses on how to negotiate a cooperative relationship with students. Developing respect for students, recognizing their moods, and learning what they are like "as people" allow Peter to maintain a relationship with his students characterized largely by trust and mutual understanding. One of Peter's students whom I talked with commented, "Mr. Karlin is the best English teacher I've ever had. He doesn't treat you like a kid."

What conditions threaten this type of relationship? Student mobility, frequent interruptions of class time, and clerical demands all constrain Peter's effectiveness. Yet, the primary constraints on classroom negotiation involve the large number of students Peter sees each day, and the lack of time available in his schedule for working with students on a one-to-one basis. It is difficult to get to know students and "treat them as people" when they arrive each day in large groups. Five times a day Peter meets thirty students with whom he is given fifty minutes. When I asked Peter what changes he would make if he could redesign his daily schedule, he responded:

> One thing I'd recommend is some type of office hour somewhere in the middle of the day — a kind of activity period when the library is open, when clubs could meet, and when teachers are available to students. With kids taking the bus to school and home, and working after school, it's impossible to give extra help. As long as I've taught, I've never really been able to sit down with individual students and go over their work.

Peter's teaching schedule is not designed to provide opportunities for him to interact with his students on a one-to-one basis. In an effort to cope with this situation, Peter has developed teaching strategies aimed at creating such opportunities within his existing schedule. These strategies involve the use of seatwork and inclass assignments. Approximately half of Peter's classroom activities require the students to work on their own with minimal teacher supervision—either reading from a textbook or completing a writing assignment. These activities free Peter's time in class, which he then uses for interacting with individual students. Such interactions represent one of the few opportunities Peter has for getting to know his students "as people."

Chapter 4

A Case Study of Classroom Practicalities: Susan Nathanson

> I think I'm more confident now in my teaching. That may be misplaced, but nobody's classroom is perfect. I have this image in my mind of the way I want to be, and I'm never that way. When I sew, I have this image of the perfect garment, and when I do anything, I want it to be perfect. But teaching in a public school cannot be perfect, even if you were, which the teacher isn't. Given the things we operate under, it's just impossible. So, you learn to compromise.

Susan Nathanson was raised on a small farm in New York, not far from a two-room school house. This small country school did not offer kindergarten, and Susan began first grade at the age of four. The following year her younger sister joined her at school. They studied together in the same classroom with four other students—a combined first, second, and third grade. Susan's elementary school closed the year she left as districts across the state began to shut down small schools and bus children to larger, "consolidated" facilities. At fifteen, Susan graduated from high school and entered a private college. She finished her Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of nineteen and began teaching that same year. Susan recalls that she entered the profession not as a career calling, but partly because "it was just your typical thing to do as a female at that time."

After twenty-one years as a classroom teacher, Susan actively seeks out opportunities for professional growth and development. She has recently been involved with writing a districtwide English curriculum guide, and is now the English department chair. Susan is also working on credentials to teach mathematics. Her work in mathematics has opened up a new field and brought her the fresh intellectual challenges she feels are necessary if she is to "keep interested" in teaching.

Susan teaches four English classes at Clawson High School: two general classes for juniors, an honors class for juniors, and an honors class for freshmen. These classes are designated simply

by grade and ability level: English 11, English 11A, and English 9A. What is Susan's day like, and how does she organize her work?

Daily Routines

At 7:35 Monday morning, Susan is working at her desk, the classroom empty and quiet. She has poured herself a cup of black coffee. As we talk, she pushes her glasses back, nods, and brings her right hand occasionally up to one side of her head to make casual gestures. She smiles responsively and answers my questions in a young voice. She is an easy person to talk with, her tone unpretentious and her speech free of professional rhetoric. I ask Susan what her first priorities are at the beginning of the school day:

> Sometimes its getting something on the board, getting ready to teach something, or—if I was organized enough the day before—I don't have to do that. It really depends. I usually leave myself a list of things I better not forget to do before school starts. Then sometimes I get interrupted. That's why, for me, I really try to get it done the day before, because people come in here for something and it shoots that twenty minutes or so, and then I'm stuck.

This particular morning there is a lot to do. It is the beginning of second term, and the weekend was spent calculating first-term grades—an activity that left little time for preparing lessons. Searching quickly through a stack of papers and books, Susan comments to herself, "Oh God, I promised second period a quiz on *The Cask of Amontillado.* I hope there's one in the guide." To Susan's relief, she finds a sample quiz, marks the page, and sets the guide on top of her desk. Students begin to arrive by 7:52. Susan greets them with casual and familiar hellos. Several students stop momentarily to talk with Susan before class. Their brief conversations are friendly and relaxed. When asked to describe her first-period class, Susan responded:

> Period one is eleventh grade generals, meaning non-college prep. It's an all right class, but with lots of skills problems. They're sleepy in the morning, not used to being here. I've got a tremendously difficult attendance problem. Half the kids are flunking because they're not showing up, and I've never had that

problem. This particular class is new this year.

I'm trying to figure out who they are and what their level is. That's difficult because what I'm finding out, and it's unfortunately true, is they're not on grade level. They're the kind of students who don't want to go to college and are just afraid of taking a harder class. They're very friendly, not very skilled, with exceptions, of course, with great exceptions.

At 7:59 the bell begins first period, and Susan takes roll:

"Ron Allan?...Vickey Allison?...David Bailey?...Wanda Dexter?....John Herman?....John's not here today? Lynda, you know John don't you?"

"Yeah, he's a real dude."

"It would be nice if you asked him to come to class."

Eight of the thirty-three first period students are absent. Standing at the front of the room, Susan reminds students of their current assignments and quickly goes over plans for the week. A communal, expected, and obligatory groan rises from the class at the mention of a Wednesday quiz. With the help of several students, Susan then passes back their writing journals that she has corrected over the weekend. While the students put away their journals, Susan introduces the topic of first-term grades:

Last week I bought a new print calculator to help me figure your grades. These grades are like a progress report; they won't go on your records. You'll have a chance to improve if you're not happy with 'em. Please talk to me if you have any problems; I'm here in the room at lunch and after school.

Susan then distributes a small slip of white paper to each student as she explains to the class how their grades were calculated and how the numbers on each slip of paper correspond to a letter grade: A, B, C, D, or F. The students show little interest or concern about their grades. They listen quietly as she explains how quiz scores were averaged in with assignment grades, but glance at their individual term grades without expression, and then push the small slips of paper into a pocket or notebook or purse where they are forgotten. No one turns to their friends to ask, "Wadja get?" No one sighs in relief or furrows their brow. Some students yawn and stretch their legs under their desks as if patiently waiting for Susan to finish her explanation. Other

students rest their heads propped up at an angle beneath one arm, a posture that unmistakably communicates boredom. A boy who had spent the first ten minutes of class grievously lamenting a minor traffic ticket he had received driving to school now accepts a near failing grade without comment or concern. In this particular adolescent culture, grades are apparently "no big deal." Any sign of delight or despair would have clearly marked the "deviant" classmate.

Susan ends her explanation and quickly moves on to a new activity. She solicits the help of several students to pass out a class set of *The Great Gatsby*, and then casually asks her class, "Does anyone remember what page we're on?" The students open their books, find the correct page, and Susan reads aloud from her own copy as the students follow along. Susan is a skillful reader. The cadence of her words and her natural intonation seem to draw the students into the story. Frequently she stops to make brief comments on character, plot, or theme. Often these comments draw on examples from her personal experience. At the end of one paragraph she comments to the class:

> I think you can feel what the author is getting at here. I'll tell you a story. The story concerns wanting something for Christmas when I was a little girl. One year the Sears catalog arrived and I fell in love with this particular doll. It was really a beautiful doll...it is a beautiful doll. I wanted that doll so much. I imagined it into a real, live, breathing thing. When I finally got it, I felt kind of strange. Not really just disappointed, but let down. The doll didn't talk to me as it had in my dreams.

Lost in her story, Susan is interrupted by another teacher in search of the videotape machine. Susan calls to the class, "timeout," as she turns to talk with her colleague. After their brief exchange, the reading continues to the end of the chapter. In the final ten minutes of class, the students return their books and relax while Susan talks casually with individuals or pairs of students about competency exams, their work outside school, their other classes, vacation plans, bass fishing, and the upcoming presidential elections.

The five minutes betweeen first and second periods are just enough time for one group of students to slip out the door and a second group to find their seats. Second period, a class that includes six boys and twenty-eight girls, is titled English 11A.

Susan warmly describes her second-period students:

> Second is my junior honors. It's the only section offered. I don't know what to say about them; I love my juniors. I had them as ninth graders. They're delightful, noisy, interested, fun. I get angry with them sometimes when they don't do the work, but I like 'em a lot.

At 8:57, time for class to begin, Susan calls to a second-period student meandering toward the back of the room: "Mr. Adams, could you please possibly locate yourself." This unusual phraseology is one of the traits of high school English teachers (who seem to possess their own tribal dialect of the English language). This dialect is more like written language than spoken language. It is characterized by quasi-formal usage, intricate syntax, and a reliance on oblique reference. At times when there was a need to remind students of her authority, Susan often lapsed into this dialect in addressing her class:

> "People, you can't possibly concentrate if it isn't quiet."
>
> "I would like to admonish you that there'll be no communication during the quiz."
>
> "Let's please get in your seats before your teacher marks you absent."

This dialect functions as an identity badge and symbol of authority. It persists for the same reasons coaches carry clipboards, science teachers wear white lab coats, and social studies teachers wear corduroy sports jackets. Use of language, appropriately enough, is just one way English teachers identify themselves to their students as English teachers. In particular, this dialect signals Susan's students that, for the time being, their interaction will be based on formal student and teacher roles.

Susan's "dialect" is subtle, but clearly recognizable. During one class Susan absentmindedly gave a wrong page number in making a homework assignment. Several of her students, of course, quickly informed Susan of her mistake. At this point, a young Hispanic girl in the back row immediately sat upright in her chair and said in playful imitation, "Why Miss Nathanson, we really should be more precise in our use of language." Susan and the other students responded with good-natured laughter. Everyone quickly recognized Susan's "teacher talk" as the object of

this student's perceptive humor.

Second period begins routinely with Susan dutifully reading the daily school announcements. Today's announcements include:

> Monday - Senior Class Candy sale brings [sic]
>
> RESTRICTED AREAS (REMINDER): The parking lots...both the front and rear...are restricted from student loitering during the ENTIRE school day. You are NOT allowed to eat lunch or gather in or about the cars. This for the car owners protection. [sic]
>
> COACH RANDLE—AREN'T YOU HUNGRY? At the rally on Friday, Coach Randle will be at the top of a ladder with two students at the bottom with pies in their hands. Do you have enough spirit to move these students up the ladder? You see, the louder you yell, the higher up the ladder these two students climb. So if you want to see Coach Randle get "pied," come to the rally and yell your loudest!
>
> On this date in 1911, the first transcontinental airplane flight from New York to California was accomplished in 49 days.

The morning announcements hold neither significance nor consequence for the class. As Susan reads them, her students talk quietly, joke, and are generally inattentive. Here Susan seems to have reached a mutual agreement with her class: You let me read the morning announcements in compliance with school policy, and I will not demand your attention. This agreement allows Susan to meet her responsibilities as a teacher without boring her students.

With morning announcements out of the way, Susan takes roll and distributes first-term grades to each student. Again, her students accept their grades with cool indifference. Susan then introduces a new lesson. First, several students pass out writing textbooks, and Susan asks the class to form small groups of five to six students each. As students swing their desks into tight circles, Susan gives each group a set of colored pens and several large fanfolded sheets of blank paper. Susan keeps her directions simple and straightforward:

> I'm going to ask you to do two things in your groups. First, look at the end of the chapter review on page eighty-seven. Read the summary and decide as a group what the main ideas are. Next,

> draw a picture or diagram or outline that somehow illustrates these main ideas.

While speaking, Susan scans the room in search of eye contact, nods, or any other visual sign that an adequate number of her students are listening to her directions and understand them. It is unnecessary for *all* the students to understand the task, but unless a certain percentage of the students are paying attention, the lesson will not carry. The degree of understanding needed to carry out an activity depends on the particular students and the particular activity. Estimating that variable is part of the craft knowledge that most teachers learn unconsciously through experience.

When Susan completes her directions, the students begin their work enthusiastically. Leaning forward over their desks, they talk, joke, laugh, playfully kick each other's feet, and write notes—activities that soon infuse the classroom with all the trappings of productive chaos. After only fifteen minutes, students have the large sheets of paper spread out on the floor or taped to a nearby wall. Quickly each group begins to sketch out figures, shapes, and diagrams, but without warning the 9:50 bell ends second period and the students scramble to gather up their work and rearrange their desks back into even rows.

The ten-minute break between second and third periods gives Susan a moment to snack on crackers and pour herself a second cup of coffee. Now she also takes time to write third period's reading assignment and daily vocabulary words on the blackboard. Third period (English 9A) includes thirty-three freshmen. At 10:00, class begins with the now familiar discussion of first-term grades. This is followed by a short multiple-choice quiz on their current reading assignment. Any discussion between students during the quiz is quickly checked by disapproving glances from peers. Quiz papers are corrected in class as Susan goes over each question to discuss the answers within the context of their reading assignment. Once their papers are collected, the students take out well-worn paperback copies of Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, and several students take turns reading aloud as the class follows along:

> Danny and I sat down. A whisper moved through the congregation, followed by the rustle of pages as prayer books were opened. An old, gray-bearded man went up to the large podium, put on

> a prayer shawl, and started the service. The old man had a weak voice, and I could barely hear him over the prayers of the worshipers. Reb Sanders stood with his back to the congregation, swaying back and forth, occasionally clapping his hands together, and the child stood to his....

The reading is abruptly interrupted by amused laughter when two dogs dash through the open door at the front of the room. Without breaking their pace, the two unexpected (and unwelcome) visitors move up one row of students and down the next. Susan brings her right hand to her forehead and loudly sighs in mock frustration. Then addressing the two mongrels in her most civil tone of voice, she politely asks them to leave. Within moments, the pair have completed their circuit around the last row of desks and race back out the door. The reading resumes without hesitation and continues through to the end of the period. Three minutes before the bell, Susan and her students close their books and relax for a brief moment before the students clear their desks and stream out the door on their way to their next class.

Susan's third-period freshmen are quickly replaced by her fourth-period juniors. Fourth period, as Susan describes, is her most difficult class:

> My fourth period class has thirty-six students. It was really rowdy, *really* obnoxious at the beginning. I mean really obnoxious. Just the sheer numbers—a lot of football players who know each other, and fourth period they've been sitting all morning. Many of them could absolutely care less. So that class is a challenge. It really is. Like first period, it's a comprehensive English class. I'm trying to teach them to read, write, listen, speak—all that good stuff in the curriculum guide.

Class activities during fourth period are similar to those during first period. After first-term grades are discussed and assignments for the upcoming week are reviewed, Susan reads aloud to the class from her copy of *The Great Gatsby*. By fourth period, however, Susan is slightly less spontaneous in her teaching. Her explanation, examples, and reading are more practiced and business-like, while her students ask fewer questions. Susan also interacts individually with fewer students during fourth period than she did during first period, and her directions to the class now have a more formal edge.

By 11:45, the end of fourth period, Susan has seen over 120

students in less than four hours. After fourth period, Susan eats lunch in her classroom where she is often joined by one or two friends who also teach at Clawson. Susan avoids eating in the faculty lunchroom, because after four classes back-to-back, she says that she doesn't "need to be with other people."

During her lunch break, I ask Susan about her lesson planning, and she comments reflectively:

> I don't think I could be as structured as some teachers. What I do often depends on how the group comes in at the beginning of the period. I tried to be super organized once. There was a teacher here years ago who was very organized—the kind that even dresses immaculately, the kind of person that looks great, everything in place, even when it rains or at the end of the day. Well, she came into my class and said, "Look, you're a wreck; your students love you, but you're so disorganized!" So just for her I got organized. But it didn't work out. I didn't like it; it wasn't any fun.

Fifth and sixth periods follow lunch. These are Susan's "free" periods. One is for teaching preparation; the other is assigned to her as the English department chair. Susan, however, does not try to make a clear distinction between these two blocks of time, using them simply for "whatever needs to be done." Today Susan spends her preparation periods by filling out absence slips, duplicating a department memo, collecting grade sheets from other teachers, talking with individual students who happen to stop by, checking on the availability of a textbook, meeting with a school counselor, and recording assignments in her roll book. These activities require three trips to the main office, one visit to the school library, and a brief stop at the duplication center. Shortly after 3:00, Susan packs up her books and papers, slips on her coat, and leaves for the day.

Teaching Constraints

The immediate constraints of Susan's work are largely defined by numbers. She has six blocks of fifty minutes each and is responsible for 135 students a day. Time and class size not only define her obligations, but also consume the vast majority of Susan's discretionary resources. Suppose, for example, that Susan were to assign her students a modest two pages of writing

per week. Over a nine-week term, this assignment would represent 2,430 pages of student writing for her to read and correct. English teachers assign writing, generally short essays, as an opportunity for students to develop their writing skills. Such assignments are central to teaching English, yet they also represent a significant commitment of the teacher's time and energy. The greater the number of students who complete a writing assignment, the greater the time and energy required to read, grade, and record their work.

Institutional Norms

Time and class size set down the basic parameters of Susan's classroom instruction. What institutional norms are associated with these two fundamental aspects of teaching? First, both the teaching schedule and class size are negotiated items in Susan's contract. When her school board and teachers' association sit down to negotiate, time and class size take on the status of bargaining chips—items that are to be protected or traded for other benefits. Their bargaining status also carries over into the daily operation of the school. Susan mentioned, for example, that the ten-minute break between second and third periods was "purchased" with a shorter lunch break.

Class size, like time, is also regarded as a type of currency. For example, Clawson has recently established a "Responsibility Center"—a room where teachers may send disruptive students to "cool off." This room is staffed by a teacher whose salary, in Susan's words, is "paid for" with an increase in class size shared among the other teachers. Susan explained her own situation as department chair by noting, "The English teachers buy my department prep for me. By not having a class that period, everyone's classes are a little bit larger."

From the teacher's perspective, large classes threaten both job satisfaction and student learning. Yet Susan and her colleagues are actually rewarded for accepting more and more students into their classrooms—rewarded with a place to send unmanageable students and with a person to represent their interests in school and district decision-making. These rewards are valuable to teachers, but they are not free. In other words, the institutional norms concerning class size assume a "closed econ-

omy." Smaller classes for Susan would mean larger classes for her colleagues. Susan is left without recourse. On one hand, she believes she could teach smaller classes more effectively. On the other hand, smaller classes would reduce support and create inequity within the department.

Classroom Vulnerability

Still another basic aspect of Susan's work concerns the vulnerability of her workplace to various types of interruption. During the week I observed Susan, she did not teach a single class free of interruptions. Several times I noted as many as eight to ten interruptions in a single class period. Students arrived late and left early, emissaries delivered messages from the office, announcements were made over the intercom system, phone calls came in, and other teachers stopped by with urgent questions.

The classroom is particularly vulnerable to interruptions for at least two reasons. First, its architecture is designed with almost complete line-of-sight openness. Yet, this physical "openness" is actually a two-edged sword. While it ensures that nothing escapes the teacher's notice, it also ensures that nothing escapes the students' notice. If anyone enters the classroom, everyone is likely to take note; if the phone rings, everyone hears; if a student is called out during a class period, everyone becomes aware of it. Thus, what takes place in the classroom is highly visible, whether or not it serves an instructional purpose. At few times during the day can one interrupt a teacher without also interrupting his or her class.

Second, social norms tend to reinforce the open and public status of the classroom. Consider, for example, that our culture at large lends a particular status to the places we live and work through the custom of knocking on doors. As in many American high schools, the ritual of "knocking before entering" does not extend to Susan's classroom. It is largely a matter of social convention to enter a classroom without first knocking.

The vulnerability of Susan's classroom to interruptions demands that she maintain a degree of flexibility in her planning and instruction. Her classroom activities *are* loosely structured. If they were not, interruptions would be a continual source of frustration to Susan and her students. Whatever Susan does in the

classroom, it must be "interruptable," otherwise it would be ill suited to her workplace.

Curriculum Mandates

Time, class size, and classroom vulnerability are aspects of teaching that shape Susan's immediate work experience. Curriculum mandates—specified topics or subject matter to be covered—also play a role in Susan's work. Several days after I had completed my observations, Susan stopped me in the hallway and gave me a document she had received from a school administrator. This document, some forty pages in length, had originated from the State Department of Education. Its agenda was devoted to setting forth arguments for establishing a "core reading list" to be taught by all English teachers in a given school district. Susan was disturbed by the nature of this document because it represented a general trend in the public schools toward more centralized control over curriculum. Susan comments:

> This whole thing with the reading list really bothers me. That whole approach to schooling is beginning to touch us here. I can understand why they want control, but the control isn't going to help. They think it will help, but it's not going to improve the quality of what goes on in the classroom to insist on teaching this particular book or whatever. It seems as if it were an easy way of evaluating the teacher to say, "Well, have they taught this book?" But it's not going to change the quality of instruction. I don't know, I went to New York schools and they had certain things we had to read and all teachers had to teach, and I know that's how I learned to hate a lot of things. The push we feel now is not going to transmit the kind of culture they think they're going to transmit. I guess what I would like to see is more autonomy and improvement in the quality of people in the profession.

Susan's arguments are based on what she believes will and will not work in the classroom. Such "practical" considerations also characterize the strategies Susan uses in her efforts to cope with work constraints.

Survival Strategies

Susan's work experience is divided between two worlds. On

one hand is the world of the classroom. It is a world overpopulated with students and punctuated by the episodic routines of taking roll, correcting student essays, recording grades, and so forth. On the other hand is the world of the institution. This less immediate world includes her colleagues, supervisors, and the professional norms of Susan's occupation. The world of the institution is bureaucratic, while the world of the classroom is personal. Two work strategies help Susan adapt to these two dimensions of her professional life. The first strategy, what Susan refers to as "creative insubordination," is used in response to bureaucratic constraints. The second strategy, "cooperative pedagogy," is used in response to classroom constraints.

Creative Insubordination

When Susan perceives school, district, or state policy as impractical, she seeks to minimize its influence. She explained as follows:

> As far as the establishment is concerned, you have got to be willing to be pragmatic. You have got to be willing to bend rules, especially if you recognize the source of the rules and it's utterly ridiculous. You've just got to if you want to keep any respect for yourself. I absolutely refuse to blindly obey some stupid rule that I know how it got made. Not necessarily flaunt rules with kids; I don't mean that at all. But when you work in a bureaucracy like this, there are a lot of really ridiculous rules, and any *reasonable* person would ignore them.

An example of how this strategy operates was suggested when Susan was planning a field trip with one of her classes. She casually mentioned to me that she was unsure about money available for transportation and that "we may have to sell Life Savers." State law, she explained, technically does not allow her to charge students for this type of activity. She may, however, sell her students Life Saver candies at an inflated price and thus secure the needed funds.

Susan does strive to work within the system, yet this sometimes requires a flexible interpretation of the rules. Another example of "creative insubordination" is how Susan and her colleagues responded to the district's decision to establish a "core reading list." The English department chairs from each school

met and decided to specify only one novel or play at each grade level. In other areas of the curriculum, just authors and types were specified: "Major American Poets," "Major British Poets," and so forth. "That was our interpretation of the policy," Susan notes. As a result, the actual curriculum *requirements* for each class are minimal. The original intent of the policy was clearly to establish some consistency within the English curriculum. Yet the policy was implemented by Susan and her colleagues in such a way as to afford teachers maximum flexibility in deciding what to teach. Susan and her colleagues could hardly be considered radical or subversive. On the contrary, their actions reflect a good deal of common sense and commitment to their professional autonomy.

Cooperative Pedagogy

While Susan's institutional life is often characterized by noncompliance with administrative mandates, her classroom life is characterized by cooperation. "Teaching is like a marriage, like a compromise," she told me, "I teach by knowing my students—their strengths and weaknesses, and what they are like as people." A good deal of Susan's time is spent talking informally with students before, during, and after classes. The quality of such interactions is both professional and personable. When Susan asks students how their week has been, or how they are getting along in other classes, her tone of voice, eye contact, and responsiveness communicate a genuine sense of concern. Moreover, her comments to the class often include self-disclosure. Consider, for example:

> My purpose with this journal assignment is to get you to think about what the word means to you personally.
>
> I realize that yesterday my explanation about this was not very clear.
>
> I was thinking last night that today I would try to step back from what we've been doing and try to look at the writing process as a whole.

Such comments invite the students to recognize her world, as if Susan wants to tell them: Look, it's important for you to realize

that as a teacher I have my own strengths and weaknesses, hopes and fears.

Susan also negotiates with her students on matters of curriculum. For example, at one point during my observations, Susan told me that she planned to show the first half of a videotape, *The Great Gatsby,* to her first- and fourth-period classes. "But before I do that," she noted, "I'll make them promise not to beg to see the end of the film before we finish the book." She continued, "Unless I negotiate with the class first, they'll beg me to see the end of the film, and I can't take that."

Susan's negotiations with her students lend her teaching a "student-centered" quality. Whether or not Susan realizes it, this cooperative approach to teaching is by far her most pragmatic work strategy. Susan's students help her teach in countless ways. They pass out papers, collect books, relay messages, help make instructional decisions, and (through peer pressure) help Susan maintain discipline. Given the size of Susan's classes and the limitations placed on her time, she simply would not be able to teach without the cooperation of her students. Consider, for example, the following comments Susan initiated during one of our conversations:

> "The principal has asked me to make a presentation at the faculty meeting next week. I know I'll be nervous. I'm always scared to death to talk in front of a group."
>
> "But Susan, you do that with your classes everyday."
>
> "Oh, that's different; with my students I've established a relationship."

In a very practical sense, Susan's students allow her to teach. Yet, perhaps more important, students provide Susan with a primary source of job satisfaction. Their responsiveness breathes life into the classroom, and their spontaneity offers a welcome diversion from the routines of taking roll, planning lessons, and correcting essays.

Coping Strategies in Perspective

What might we learn from the strategies Susan uses in order to cope with her work? First, it would seem important to recognize "creative insubordination" as a legitimate work strat-

egy. Susan cannot possibly meet all the obligations placed on her as a teacher. If she were held strictly accountable to the bureaucratic constraints of her work, she would likely have little time left to actually teach. The issue, therefore, is not that she ignores certain obligations, but rather that she does so intelligently and in the interest of her students. This requires that Susan be able and willing to interpret institutional rules with some flexibility. Even if it were possible, would we want teachers to behave in any other way? Would we want them to blindly follow any rule without first considering the needs and welfare of their students?

Susan's second strategy, cooperative pedagogy, provides a useful metaphor for understanding teaching. It is the metaphor of building a relationship. Several times Susan referred to her teaching as "like a marriage." This implies a relationship characterized by give-and-take, compromise, acceptance, sharing, and mutual understanding. Contrast this view with the more common "production" metaphor for education. This latter metaphor suggests relationships of authority and accountability. To understand the production model, we look for inputs and outputs, performance factors, and task characteristics. In contrast, to understand a marriage we must begin the slow process of coming to know the situations of individuals—their relations with others as well as their beliefs, values, hopes, and expectations.

Epilogue

Ten months after I completed my observations, Susan called to inform me that she had left the teaching profession. During the previous summer she had accepted a job as a technical writer for a large electronics company in the San Francisco bay area. At that time, the electronics industry was in a severe economic slump, yet Susan had no difficulty in securing her new position. Susan's beginning salary started at 9 percent above what she had been making after twenty-one years in the classroom.

Why did Susan choose to leave the teaching profession? She explained her decision as follows:

> I felt the need to grow, so I looked around the profession, and there was nothing there, no place to go. I thought to myself, "I've taught for twenty-one years, but how am I going to sustain my enthusiasm for another twenty years?" I was taking courses in

> math, but I was concerned about the quality of people I would be working with. I love what I'm doing now. Everyday I'm learning.

Susan needed opportunities for development, opportunities that offered some sense of achievement and continued progress. As she discovered, such opportunities are largely unavailable to high school teachers.

Still, what Susan has found outside the field of education includes more than just opportunities for professional growth. At one point in our conversation, she commented:

> I go into the cafeteria at work and say, "This is really nice," and the people there think I'm crazy. But there's no graffiti on the walls, everything's clean, and the food is delicious. There are even fresh mums sitting on the tables. It's not at all like working in a school.

Fresh flowers are not as trivial as one might think. For Susan, they are a symbol that someone cares about the quality of her day-to-day work experience. Unfortunately, such symbols are almost entirely absent in our schools, and their absence communicates a subtle message regarding the worth and value of those we have entrusted with the responsibilities of teaching.

Chapter 5

The Teacher as Street-Level Bureaucrat

The previous case studies offer only a brief glimpse of professional life in schools. Nevertheless, these snapshots do suggest some broad themes relevant to classroom teaching. For example, all the teachers in the study spoke of their work in terms of the practical, task-oriented dimensions of providing daily instruction. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

> We have certain titles to cover in the course of a semester, and a certain amount of essays to read. There's a timetable.
>
> I always, always correct papers on weekends.
>
> I usually leave myself a list of things I'd better not forget to do before school starts.
>
> When I come in, I either have things lined up in here to staple, correct papers, do some typing, or go through my folders.

These relatively discrete tasks, what I have called *curriculum management*, are captured by the metaphor of teacher as street-level bureaucrat. They represent a basic dilemma for teachers because of their open-ended nature. That is, daily activities such as reviewing text materials, preparing lessons, planning assignments, and grading student work will always expand to meet (or surpass) the teacher's available resources. Simply put, curriculum management is a never-ending process. There is always more that could be done if time allowed. Even after thirty-two years of teaching, one teacher I observed still spends up to fifty hours a week preparing for his classes. As he described his work, "It's like a menu that you always keep testing and changing. You can't have corn beef and cabbage five days a week."

Conservation Strategies

While curriculum management tasks are open-ended, resources are not. Teachers can devote only so many hours a day to

class preparation, and can correct only so many student assignments before they reach the limits of their endurance. The teacher mentioned above, who spends fifty hours a week in class preparation, commented further:

> I have a hundred and forty-seven students in my five classes, and that's really a physical and mental burden. When it comes right down to it, every extra body in the room is another essay, paper, or composition. That's what gets me—the stacks of papers.

This resource dilemma often leads to a sense of dissonance between what teachers would like to accomplish and what they actually can accomplish. One participating teacher noted, for example:

> I wish I could go twenty-four hours a day—give a paper, correct it, bring it back the next day for all five classes. I think that's the way students learn. But, you know, that's physically impossible ....I don't feel I'm spending as much time as I should. I do come in on weekends and work, but I'm one of those people who have to tell themselves, "This is enough; this is all I can do."

This particular teacher has learned to cope with his work by falling back on the belief that he is functioning the best he possibly can under difficult circumstances. Yet this strategy works only if he continues to operate at the very limits of what he can achieve. In other words, the coping strategy itself demands that he carry out his work without reserves of time or energy. Working at the absolute limits of one's capabilities may testify to the commitment of individual teachers. Still, this situation creates a number of disturbing consequences. First, it establishes an inverse relationship between the quality and quantity of instruction that teachers are able to provide. Any increase in the amount of instruction offered must be accommodated by compromises in quality. This is illustrated by the way Peter Karlin describes the curriculum for his English classes:

> Now I have to put the creative writing with the essay writing, with the vocabulary, with the mechanics, and with American and English literature....Everything suffers. I've had to water everything down, and skip things.

This point reinforces the central lesson learned by Theodore Sizer (1984) from his research on American high schools—that

today's teachers often view compromise in instructional quality as a matter of daily necessity. Yet there is a second, and perhaps more important, issue. This is the tendency for teachers to redefine their teaching in terms of personal survival.

One teacher in the study commented, for example:

> I don't think I'm doing the job that I'd like to do. I've had to back down on requirements and quality. This year I have five English classes, and I've just had to tell myself, "Survival is the name of the game."

Even Alan Hargrove argued this point: "There are times when you're teaching five periods that the goal is to survive the day. I think it's a luxury to be able to say, 'OK, well that worked pretty well, but next time I can do it better'." In discussing the day-to-day routines of his work, still another teacher noted:

> I don't know how else to describe it. It's like chasing a tiger around and around a tree. The faster you run, the faster the tiger runs. You can never quite catch up, and you can't slow down either because you're not always sure whether you're chasing the tiger, or the tiger's chasing you.

Simplification of Teaching

All the teachers I observed had developed strategies that help them conserve scarce resources, allowing them to provide instruction at "minimal cost" in terms of their own time and energy. Many of these conservation strategies are common features of classroom life. Consider, for example, Peter Karlin's point system for grading student assignments. Peter is faced with a potentially arduous and time-consuming task; that is, evaluating anywhere between 30 and 150 student poems or essays. By prespecifying the criteria he will use (mechanics, tone, appeal to audience, and so forth) and assigning each criterion a point value, Peter is able to standardize this task and ultimately reduce the process of assigning a grade down to a matter of simple addition. It should be clear that no "system" is able to transform Peter's work into a purely mechanical process. However, such routines do help shield him from the demands of continually having to think through every decision he makes.

Developing standard routines that simplify one's work is

clearly common to most, if not all, occupations. Yet certain types of classroom routines—such as point systems, multiple-choice tests, and worksheets—may be problematic insofar as they lead to what Elliot Eisner (1985b) has called "structured fragmentation." This oxymoron refers to the common practice of breaking curricula down into isolated bits and pieces so that they may be efficiently "processed." The coherence of the classroom curriculum then comes to depend on procedures and rules rather than substance.

Eisner's concern is that structured fragmentation makes it difficult for students to secure substantive meaning from their school experience. Their schooling becomes simply a game of passing tests, following rules, and accumulating credits toward graduation. But how does structured fragmentation affect teachers? If survival demands that they simply "cover" or "process" curriculum efficiently, a development that Michael Apple (1986) refers to as work "intensification," teachers are less likely to become intellectually engaged with the subject matter they teach. Indeed, I often found such engagement conspicuously absent in the day-to-day professional lives of the teachers I observed.

Isolation by Choice

Routines that simplify teaching represent one type of conservation strategy. A second type, one quite different in how it characterizes patterns of work, involves the professional isolation of teachers. Interaction with fellow teachers rarely figured into the daily work experience of teachers at the schools I visited. Participating teachers who chose to eat lunch in their classrooms could go the entire school day without face-to-face interaction with another adult. Such isolation is often accepted as a *condition* under which teachers work. Yet in observing the teachers in the study, it became increasingly clear to me that they not only accept their isolation, but actively strive to maintain it. They do so by "hiding out" in their classrooms during breaks as well as before and after school, taking work (for example, student assignments to be graded) with them to faculty meetings, and avoiding any involvement with department or schoolwide committees.*

*Teacher isolation as a work strategy is more fully described in Flinders (1988).

There seem to be at least two reasons for engaging in such behavior. First, teachers spend much of their school day in interaction with large numbers of students, and although Seymour Sarason and his associates (1966) have described teaching as a "lonely profession," it is one paradoxically overcrowded with interpersonal demands. Recall, for example, Susan Nathanson's comment that after four classes back-to-back each morning, she feels that she does not need—and certainly does not want—"to be with other people."

A second reason for isolationist strategies concerns the daily demands of teaching, and this brings us back to the main point—that isolation is inextricably tied to the conservation of the teacher's resources, particularly time. Peter Karlin summed it up in saying: "The teachers here don't really talk to one another; they don't have time." Another way to think about this is that the demands of curriculum management place considerable pressure on teachers to protect their time and energy by engaging only in those activities that have a direct and immediate impact on their ability to meet those demands. This forces teachers to be highly pragmatic when it comes to their involvement in professional activities. Peter, for example, applied such pragmatic standards to his early involvement in his local teachers' association, noting, "I gave that up when I realized that it did nothing to help my teaching." Another teacher's comments reflect a similar logic:

> I generally refuse any committee assignments because I feel it's a waste of time and effort. There's no personal satisfaction because the parties that should see results, or that could affect a better atmosphere for teaching, aren't interested or can't effectively move in those areas.

Isolation not only separates teachers from one another, but also separates them from school administrators and other "support" personnel. It is unusual for the teachers I observed even to see, let alone interact with, their school principal during the course of a typical week. Peter Karlin's brief exchange with his principal regarding the "takeover" of the faculty lounge was one of only two times that I ever saw a principal during my six weeks of "shadowing" classroom teachers. Nor did I often find teachers talking with other administrators. As might be expected, Susan's department chair responsibilities (for which she was given a reduced teaching load) did marginally increase her contact with

both administrators and fellow teachers. Yet, as far as I could observe, this contact consisted mainly of brief encounters.

Alan Hargrove, in contrast, did interact daily with Mark Reese, the teacher with whom he team-taught the academic decathlon course. These two teachers had developed a close working relationship that could well be described as genuinely collegial. Yet given the strong support and recognition that the academic program received, this case can hardly be considered typical. It is an exception that proves the rule. When I asked Alan what school administrators could do to better support his teaching, he stated unequivocally: "What they do best is just stay out of my way." Another teacher summed up his situation by stating, "You never see anybody...you'd think that administrators would be more visible, but it seems like they're caught up in paperwork and meetings."

Perhaps it makes good sense for administrators to devote their time to the immediate logistics of running the school rather than to activities more directly related to supervision and/or instructional improvement. Avoiding contact with teachers may well be a survival strategy for administrators in the same way that avoiding contact with administrators is a survival strategy for teachers. Nevertheless, when this situation is coupled with collegial isolation, it leaves classroom teachers with few sources of feedback and guidance.

Beyond Curriculum Management

Conservation strategies, whether they concern isolation or curriculum "processing," help explain how teachers manage their day-to-day work. Given the never-ending nature of curriculum management, the large number of students that teachers work with each day, and the constraints on their time, conservation strategies are highly adaptive for professional survival (at least—as Susan Nathanson's case shows— in the short run). Still, there is more to teaching than curriculum management. While all the teachers I observed described their work in terms of the task-oriented, practical aspects of instruction, they also spoke of their work in another way; they were equally prone to talking about (and demonstrating) the interpersonal aspects of teaching. These are reflected in quotes such as:

> I'm here to work with the kids....It's not a matter of "dispensing" education; it's more a sharing.
>
> The first thing is to learn to treat the student as a person.
>
> I go in the classroom, and I certainly don't become an eighteen-year-old, but it's a fairly casual sort of atmosphere, and we have fun together.
>
> I teach by knowing my students—their strengths and weaknesses, and what they are like as people.

Some teachers may use conservation strategies in this domain of their work, but I failed in my observations to find much evidence of teachers processing students in the same ways they process curriculum. Nor were the teachers in the study able to effectively isolate themselves from their students (a finding that I regard as fortunate). These teachers had, of course, developed strategies for working through student/teacher relationships, but in order to understand these strategies we must turn to a different metaphor.

Chapter 6

The Teacher as Negotiator

Even the teachers I observed who were most firmly entrenched in collegial isolation and curriculum processing were deeply concerned with their students and with the life experiences of their students outside as well as inside the classroom. They referred to these individuals as "my students" or "the kids," and always called them by first names— "Emily," "Ted," "Chris," "Evelyn," "Paul." In short, their relationship with "the kids" went beyond the level of "providing services."

A Cooperative Alliance

More to the point, all the teachers I observed organized their work in ways that favor the development of a personal and cooperative alliance with their students. They negotiate this alliance using a wide variety of strategies. First, they create "pockets of time" within their hectic schedules for interacting with students on a one-to-one basis. One teacher actually sets aside one day a week for what he calls "mini-conferences." On this day the students work independently while the teacher moves around the room talking with individual students about their assignments, grades, homework, and so forth.

Second, teachers occasionally bend school and classroom rules when doing so is in the best interest of their students. This is what Susan Nathanson referred to as "creative insubordination," arguing that a willingness to interpret rules with some flexibility is absolutely necessary to good teaching. Third, teachers use humor, self-disclosure, and individual recognition as interpersonal strategies that foster a sense of solidarity within the classroom.

Fourth, the teachers I observed sometimes involved students directly in curriculum decision-making. Recall, for example, that Peter Karlin gives his students the opportunity to discuss and vote on the grading criteria used to evaluate their assignments. Such negotiation strategies clearly involve a great deal of give-

76

and-take between students and teacher. They also involve a degree of understanding and confirmation on the part of the teacher. As Peter Karlin put this:

> It's important to appreciate students, to appreciate the value that's there, to see that value. If they're full of beans, appreciate the vitality there; if they're outspoken, appreciate the frankness. There are ways of appreciating those things.

The teachers I observed hold many reasons for negotiating a cooperative alliance with their students. These reasons stem from the teachers' reliance on student assistance, their dependency on students as a source of feedback, their enjoyment of students, and their need to actively win student engagement.

Reliance on Student Assistance

In the most practical terms, students can serve as one of the teacher's primary resources. Starting with the prosaic, students help distribute handouts, collect books and papers, relay messages, help maintain discipline through peer pressure, contribute to class discussions, and assume responsibility for a broad range of instructional decisions. Each time students reach a decision about some aspect of their own education, it is one less decision the teacher must make. At this practical level, then, high school teachers would find their work far more difficult, if not impossible, without some degree of cooperation from their students.

Sources of Feedback

In addition, because teachers often find it necessary to isolate themselves from colleagues and supervisors, students serve as one of the few sources of feedback that teachers have for evaluating their own work. As one teacher commented:

> I think the real test in teaching is how the kids feel about you. Are you interested? Are you just grinding this out waiting for retirement? Are you burnt out? How do you handle a delicate situation? Are you late coming into the room? Are you prepared? Do you know what you're talking about? Do you like us? The kids know these things, and it's those vibrations that you pick up from them that tell you the most.

Feedback from students, in this respect, is another practical reason for teachers to maintain classroom relationships that will facilitate communication. This source of feedback is lost if students become withdrawn or attempt to "psych-out" the teacher by providing only feedback that they believe the teacher wants to hear. In such cases, teaching becomes a game of hide-and-seek. The teacher must seek out the students' hidden feelings, beliefs, and interests. For teachers, this is a difficult game to win.

Enjoyment of Students

Teachers also hold less practical reasons for striving to maintain some sort of cooperative alliance with their students. Stated most simply, students are, at times, a source of enjoyment. Their spontaneity, curiosity, and imagination can offer teachers a welcome diversion from the daily grind of correcting papers, taking roll, making assignments, and planning lessons. "Seeing students learn," in the words of one participating teacher, "is one of the few rewards of teaching." Unfortunately, the conditions under which teachers work do not always foster such rewards.

Winning Students' Engagement

A final reason for teachers' negotiating with students is concerned with the students' "nonvoluntary" status. Student participation in class is to some degree demanded by compulsory education standards and graduation requirements. That is, all but a few students feel that they have little choice regarding their physical presence in the classroom. Yet they do have control over their willingness to participate and learn. Another way to put this is that a teacher's aspirations often include such goals as fostering self-esteem, respect for others, creative problem-solving, and self-actualization—the very qualities of human development that are least subject to coercion.

It may be best to regard the students' "nonvoluntary" status as only a surface reality given that the teachers' formal authority is quite tenuous when it comes down to the practical business of getting students to learn. This is one of the lessons teachers learn from their work: that their own authority is at least in part given to them by their students, and not entirely dependent on their po-

sitions or their superior knowledge of the subject matter.

This "lesson" is evident in Peter Karlin's professional development. He began his career by relying heavily on his formal, "surface" authority as a teacher. In his words, "I went in with the idea that this is *my* classroom, and *you* [the students] conform to the rules." Yet Peter has gradually adopted a more cooperative approach to teaching, as his advice to beginning teachers reveals:

> The first thing to learn is to treat the student as a person,...trust the students, and never criticize or threaten a student so that you destroy the relationship to the point where it can't be recovered.

Peter's advice is not simply professional rhetoric. He backs it up, as noted earlier, with teaching strategies that are designed to provide opportunities for individual recognition and student participation in classroom decision-making. Such cooperative negotiation strategies, however, are constrained by the predominance of task demands. Faced with "curriculum processing" for large numbers of students without time for interacting with students on an individual basis, teachers are not in a favorable position to develop student/teacher cooperation. The large number of students that teachers confront—and try to teach—each day is particularly problematic. As one teacher noted:

> Kids so quickly lose their identity in a group. Some of them are very clever about it. They've learned how to remain anonymous in the classroom, and teachers become so involved with the sheer numbers, with preparation and execution, that I think we spread ourselves too thin.

This teacher copes with his dilemma by using a strategy, referred to earlier, that he calls "mini-conferences." He justifies this strategy by commenting:

> In each class, I try to spend at least one period a week down with the students. It's nice to talk one-to-one, and it helps break the mannequin-like image of me standing up in front of the room. It really pays tremendous dividends—allows them to ask questions, and I find out a lot.

Again, this teacher's efforts are not unique. Most of the teachers I observed rely on short inclass assignments to provide them with opportunities (pockets of time) for talking with and learning about individual students.

Flexibility

It should be clear that the negotiation strategies described above depend on flexibility in how teachers plan instruction and organize class time. Such flexibility is important because it underpins the teacher's responsiveness to the particular "chemistry" of a given class. As Susan Nathanson noted, "I don't think I could be as structured as some teachers. What I do often depends on how the group comes in at the beginning of the period." Recall also Peter Karlin's comments:

> I used to write everything out, all the questions I was going to ask, trying to figure out what reaction I was going to get from the kids. Now I don't. I just go in with the material I'm going to cover; I ad-lib a lot, and when I make a mistake, I laugh. If something comes up that the students like, I go with it. I have a tendency to trust the students more.

The practical value of flexibility helps explain why the teachers I observed did not define their work simply in terms of mechanically following the dictates of a curriculum guide. Their instruction planning, for example, did not include efforts to write up anything that resembled a formal lesson plan. Instead, as we saw with Peter Karlin, planning took the form of brief notes jotted down on scraps of paper or in the margins of a textbook. Still, Peter, Alan, Susan, and the other teachers observed were highly conscientious in their work; they would never walk into their classrooms unprepared. It is simply that these teachers have learned from teaching that the fluid, relational concerns of their day-to-day work demand flexibility.

The preceding paragraphs have focused on the demands of classroom teaching and some of the strategies that teachers develop in response to these demands. On one hand, an understanding of the teacher as a street-level bureaucrat highlights strategies (for example, curriculum management and isolation) that are governed by conservation. On the other hand, an understanding of the teacher as a negotiator brings into focus a set of strategies (such as including students in curricular decision-making and "creative insubordination") that are governed by cooperation. What implications do these strategies hold for educational policy and reform?

80

Chapter 7

Policy Implications

It should be easy to recognize at this point that this research was not intended to provide simple solutions to the complex problems that teachers face. Nor do I believe that highly prescriptive recommendations will foster our best efforts to improve the quality of instruction that students receive in the classroom. What I will do in this final chapter is to identify several policy issues that need to be examined within the context of classroom teaching. My task, in other words, is to address the subtitle of this monograph: *Educational Practice* Can *Inform Policy.*

The Work-Resource Dilemma

The first implications that deserve attention stem from the task demands of curriculum management and the limited resources available to teachers for meeting these demands. All of us work under less than ideal conditions. Yet because lesson planning, grading, and ongoing instruction are such time-consuming activities, the gulf between ideal and actual achievements may be particularly difficult for teachers to bridge.

A variety of constraints (ranging from large class size to competing demands on instructional time) contribute to this work-resource dilemma. As it intensifies, teachers must increasingly rationalize their work as a matter of producing the best possible results under difficult circumstances. This is why Peter candidly admits to the necessity of having to "water everything down," and why Alan describes instructional improvement as "a luxury."

Survival vs. Student Learning

It may seem a matter of common sense to want teachers to do their best. Nevertheless, working without reserves of time and energy holds a number of problematic consequences for classroom teachers. It quickly leads, for example, to the type of goal

displacement reflected in Alan's comment that "there are times when you're teaching five periods that the goal is to survive the day." Recall also another teacher's conclusion that "survival is the name of the game," or a third teacher's description of his work as like chasing a tiger around a tree and then gradually realizing that the tiger is chasing you, not you chasing the tiger. The point is that in many cases teachers need to hold some "back up" resources if they are to turn their attention from their own survival to the personal and intellectual growth of their students.

It is in this context that calls from political leaders for educators to "redouble their efforts" (Bennett 1987) are, at their very best, empty rhetoric. Some teachers may possess a reservoir of untapped resources that could fuel increased efforts, yet I failed to find such teachers in the schools where I conducted my research. For teachers operating without reserves of time or energy, the advice to "try harder" will only augment their frustrations. Indeed, the opposite advice—"slow down a bit, step back from your work, *do less*, build up rather than dissipate your energies"—may be far more appropriate advice for a significant percentage of today's high school teachers.

Rewards for Undermining Quality

Other disturbing consequences of the teacher's work-resource dilemma relate directly to conservation strategies aimed at efficiently "processing" curriculum. Recall, for example, Peter Karlin's use of short-answer quizzes or his point system for grading student poetry. As noted earlier, these processing strategies not only fragment subject matter and thus make it difficult for students to understand, they also inhibit the teacher's own learning and development.

Schools and districts have responded to such professional development concerns by providing institutional rewards (recognition and salary increases) to those teachers willing to take inservice workshops or education courses offered at local universities. Although such activities are generally well intentioned, they are typically structured as supplemental to the daily tasks of providing instruction. In other words, they are activities *added on* to the teacher's regular teaching responsibilities. Their net effect, from the teachers' point of view, is to increase the task

demands of their work. If teachers lack available resources to compensate for these increased demands, they must respond (as Peter Karlin did) by "watering everything down." This puts teachers in the curious position of being rewarded for undermining the quality of their instruction. In other words, adding activities to the teachers' schedule (even when such activities are designed to promote professional development) will in many cases only push teachers further toward adopting a "processing mentality." It may be that our most critical challenge is in learning how to reconceptualize staff development as a mechanism for increasing (instead of reducing) the resources available to classroom teachers.

Teacher Change vs. Teacher Support

Traditionally, staff development activities have centered on the task of changing teachers in one way or another. This orientation has also become increasingly popular in areas such as curriculum development (with its growing interest in faculty in-service), teacher supervision, and program evaluation. Within each of these areas a widespread shift in focus from policy formulation to policy implementation has quickly followed the realization that successful reform is won or lost at the classroom level. In short, we have rediscovered teachers as the key to school improvement. Thus, we now find a broad range of educational specialists who define teacher change as a central aim of their work (see, for example, Guskey 1986).

While teacher change now orients much of our thinking, an alternative approach may be far more in tune with the "realities" of classroom instruction. If, as my research suggests, any change that increases the task demands on teachers without offering compensating resources will threaten the quality of their teaching, then instructional improvement depends largely on providing the right resources, at the right time, to the right people. This perspective might be referred to as a *resource-management* approach to educational reform. Its primary focus is on teacher support as opposed to teacher change. Educational policy-makers, school administrators, and curriculum specialists who assume this approach would not define their work in terms of persuading teachers to adopt some new program or teaching

method. Nor would these professionals necessarily view teacher resistance to change as the primary barrier to school improvement. In cases where change undermines the quality of classroom instruction, it is the teachers' efforts to minimize the impact of change that deserve support.

This alternative approach also holds significant practical implications for how educational planning and school management are carried out. Take, for example, the work of curriculum specialists. These professionals have long focused their efforts on the types of questions set out in Ralph Tyler's (1949) rationale for curriculum development: What objectives do schools seek to attain? What learning activities will attain these objectives? How will these activities be organized? And, how will they be evaluated? These questions are, to use Everett Rogers' (1982) distinction, *innovation-oriented* rather than *user-oriented.*

A user-oriented approach to curriculum development would augment the specialist's considerations to include such questions as:

1. How will the proposed curriculum influence the task demands of teaching (that is, what do we expect teachers to do with this curriculum)?
2. What classroom resources will be needed to meet increased demands as the curriculum is implemented?
3. How will these resources be provided? Where will they originate? How and when will they be made available to teachers?

Where might we begin in addressing such questions? An improved understanding of professional life in schools is a necessary first step, but this will not be possible without cooperation between classroom teachers and "resource managers." On this point, we can learn some highly valuable lessons from how teachers negotiate a cooperative relationship with their students. They do so by creating opportunities to interact with students on a one-to-one basis, involving students in instructional decision-making, learning to trust students, providing individual recognition, and bending rules in the students' interest.

Those who seek educational reform might consider developing similar strategies for establishing a cooperative alliance with classroom teachers. Again, such strategies could include (1) creating both more sustained and more substantial opportunities

than now exist for policy makers and teachers to interact on a one-to-one basis, (2) involving teachers directly in decision-making and leadership roles, (3) learning new ways to confirm teachers as professionals and recognize their best efforts, and (4) bending rules when doing so is in the teachers' interests.

Recognizing the Roots of Isolation

Still another dimension of resource management concerns the professional isolation of teachers. The teachers who took part in this study have much to learn from one another regarding both their pedagogical skills and the subject matter they teach. Yet this potential source of development and mutual support is seldom, if ever, realized in the course of their daily work. I have suggested earlier that teacher isolation can be understood as largely self-imposed. That is, isolation can be reconceptualized as a form of *insulation*. As such, it is not simply a condition under which teachers work, but also a conservation strategy that allows teachers to husband scarce resources.

Perhaps this perspective can be most readily understood by reflecting on one's own work experience. When faced with particularly strong pressure from the demands of our job, it is not uncommon to respond by closing the office door, cancelling luncheon appointments, and generally avoiding interaction with others unless it is required by the particular tasks that occupy our immediate attention. It should not be surprising to find that teachers have developed similar work strategies. Not only are they likely to feel pressed to conserve resources, but the high rates of interaction demanded by teaching large numbers of students may provide teachers with an extra incentive for avoiding additional interpersonal contact.*

Isolation, viewed as a conservation strategy, represents as much a consequence of classroom teaching as it does a physical condition. Reforms intended to "de-isolate" teachers typically have not recognized this critical distinction, and have thus

---

*Philip Jackson's (1965) research indicates that elementary teachers, who generally work with a smaller total number of students than do secondary teachers, engage in as many as 1,000 interactions with students each day.

focused on treating the outward symptoms of a far more deeply entrenched problem. We should not, for example, expect to foster mutual support simply by removing classroom walls, creating teacher centers, or providing inservice workshops that are designed to teach interpersonal skills. Creating opportunities and enhancing skills may be in some cases *necessary*, but such efforts are by no means *sufficient* when teachers lack the resources required by the demands of their work. For teachers who have come to define teaching in terms of professional survival, collegial interaction will remain a low priority regardless of the opportunities and skills they hold for such interaction.

Reform efforts to promote collegiality will require a shift in focus from opportunities and skills to the occupational barriers that separate classroom teachers. In particular, we need an improved understanding of how to provide the types of resources that will allow teachers to redefine their work in ways that encourage collegial interaction. Perhaps foremost, collegial interaction requires time that is in some way protected from the task demands of providing day-to-day instruction. Beyond this, reform efforts might also benefit from a recognition of teachers as adult learners. Alan, Peter, and Susan do not expect their students to learn without sensitive feedback, an atmosphere of trust, and an educationally rich environment, yet rarely do our schools ensure that teachers are given similar provisions.

Mismatch between Rewards and the Concerns of Teachers

In focusing on teacher isolation I do not mean to imply that institutional rewards, in the way of support and individual recognition, are entirely absent in the professional lives of the teachers I observed. However, much of the support that these teachers do receive is poorly aligned with the central concerns of classroom teaching. Alan Hargrove, for example, received a great deal of recognition when the Northway academic decathlon team won its county competition. This recognition came in the form of a congratulatory phone call from the superintendent, local press coverage, and assured financial support for the academic decathlon program. Yet Alan views such "rewards" with considerable ambivalence because he himself questions whether or not test

scores are a valid indicator of good teaching. As he notes: "It's silly really; you take six kids out of 1600, ask 'em fifty questions, and people take that as some indication of how well we're doing."

Connecting student test performance with institutional rewards is not unique to Alan's teaching experience. At Clawson, Peter and Susan's school, test scores were explicitly tied to school funding. This was made clear by a Clawson administrator when he announced at a faculty meeting that the school would receive additional state money because of a recent increase in schoolwide test scores. This administrator may have believed that his announcement was providing the teachers with some well-deserved recognition. Yet Peter and Susan, like Alan, do not regard test scores as a central concern of their work.

This mismatch between institutional rewards and classroom teaching is also evident at Clawson in the practice of using class size as a type of currency or bargaining chip for obtaining other benefits. One Clawson teacher explained how this works:

> The teachers this year had to "buy" someone to take care of discipline problems. Each of us agreed to take on extra students in order to have the Responsibility Center, where we can send students if they become intolerable.

The English teachers at Clawson also use class size to "purchase" the free period that allows Susan Nathanson to take on her department chair responsibilities. Using class size in this way allows teachers to secure important resources: a place to send disruptive students and a person to represent their interests in school and district decision-making. The cost of providing these resources is shouldered by teachers accepting more and more students into their classes. Larger classes increase the amount of time these teachers must spend correcting essays, quizzes, and assignments; keeping track of attendance; and recording grades. Thus, as we saw earlier with professional development activities, the net effect of this practice is actually to reward teachers for making their work more difficult. In the long-run, such forms of institutional support are likely to undermine the quality of instruction that students receive.

External Control vs. Human Judgment

The implications considered thus far are grounded largely on

an understanding of teachers as street-level bureaucrats who, in responding to work-resource dilemmas, isolate themselves and manage curriculum in ways that conserve scarce time and energy. Yet I have also characterized teachers as classroom negotiators, and this metaphor also holds far-reaching implications for educational policy and reform. As negotiators, Alan, Peter, and Susan have developed work strategies aimed at fostering a cooperative relationship with their students. Recall that these strategies include self-disclosure, interacting with students individually, involving students in instructional decision-making, and developing an understanding of students "as people."

Compared with conservation strategies, these cooperative strategies are less dependent on routine, standardized procedures. Instead, they represent highly context-dependent, interpersonal processes that rely primarily on case-by-case decision-making. Another way to put this is that the truly *ineffective* negotiator, whether in the classroom or at the bargaining table, is one whose hands are tied by rigid procedures and prespecified outcomes. When we are dealing with relationships between people, it may always be that rules and recipes fall short, unable to replace human judgment.

The implications of this again run contrary to current trends in educational policy and management where we have witnessed a growing emphasis on centralized control as a means for ensuring teacher accountability. But if we view teaching as more than simply a "delivery system," then instructional improvement is now likely to depend on the willingness of policy-makers to relinquish their direct control (rather than tighten it) over what happens in the classroom. The issue is not that teachers should be held unaccountable, but that the very qualities defining effective instruction are those least subject to external control.

On this point there is an instructive parallel between policy-making and Peter Karlin's career development. Peter reports that early in his career he was known among his students as "The Colonel" and that he was continually preoccupied with maintaining strict control over classroom behavior. Yet slowly, over twenty-six years of teaching, Peter has shifted his efforts from maintaining control to providing guidance and support. This is the lesson that Peter as a classroom "policy-maker" offers those who seek to improve education.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have described a study focusing on the professional lives of classroom teachers. In doing so I have made an effort, by including three case studies, to portray teachers' professional lives as closely tied to their daily instructional routines. Finally, I have developed the implications of understanding the teacher's work from two theoretical perspectives. First, the task demands under which Alan, Peter, and Susan work (and the conservation strategies they have developed in response to these demands) help put into focus the need to reconceptualize the roles of curriculum specialists, supervisors, and administrators along the lines of resource management. Second, the interpersonal demands of teaching and the use of classroom negotiation strategies highlight the possibilities for promoting a cooperative relationship between policy-makers and school practitioners.

In closing, I would like to return to the central assumption upon which my research is grounded. It is that educational practice can and should inform educational policy. Realizing such *informed* policy largely depends on our ability to move beyond the stereotyped images that we hold of classroom teachers. As Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) notes:

> As long as teachers are denigrated or idealized, as long as our images imprison them in constricting roles, the educational policies directed at their support will be misplaced and poorly designed. Policies must be focused on images that come closest to conveying the complexities, uncertainties, and processes of the teachers' lives in "real" settings.

This is the central challenge of both educational policy and research.

Bibliography

Acheson, Keith A., and Meredith D. Gall. *Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers.* Second Edition. New York: Longman, 1987.

Apple, Michael W. *Teachers and Texts.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

Bennett, William. Quoted in "'The Blob' Slows School Reform." Associated Press, *The Register-Guard,* Eugene, Oregon. February 11, 1987. 5A.

The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century.* Hyattsville, Maryland: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986.

Doyle, Walter. "Classroom Organization and Management." In *Handbook of Research on Teaching,* edited by Marlin C. Wittrock. 392-431. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.

Eisner, Elliot W. *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs.* Second Edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985a.

_____. *What Schools Are Like: Views from the Inside.* Stanford-in-the-Schools Project: Curriculum Panel Report. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University, 1985b.

Elbaz, Freema. *Teacher Thinking: A Study of Practical Knowledge.* New York: Nichols Publishing Company, 1983.

Flinders, David J. "What Teachers Learn from Teaching: Educational Criticisms of Instructional Adaptation." Doctoral dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of Education, Stanford University. 1987.

_____. "Teacher Isolation and the New Reform." *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4, 1 (1988): 17-29.

Goodlad, John I. *A Place Called School.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984.

Guskey, Thomas R. "Staff Development and the Process of Teacher Change." *Educational Researcher* 15, 5 (May 1986): 5-12.

The Holmes Group. *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group.* East Lansing, Michigan: The Holmes Group, Michigan State University, 1986.

Hunter, Madeline. *Mastery Teaching.* El Segundo, California: TIP Publications, 1982.

Jackson, Philip W. "Teacher-Pupil Communication in the Elementary Classroom: An Observational Study." Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 1965.

Lightfoot, Sara Lawrence. "The Lives of Teachers." In *Handbook of Teaching and Policy,* edited by Lee S. Shulman and Gary Sykes. 241-60. New York: Longman, 1983.

Lipsky, Michael. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980.

McLaughlin, Milbrey W. "Implementation as Mutual Adaptation: Change in Classroom Organization." *Teachers College Record* 77 (1976): 339-51.

Rogers, Everett M. *Diffusion of Innovations.* New York: Free Press, 1982.

Sarason, Seymour B., and others. "Teaching Is a Lonely Profession." In *Psychology in Community Settings: Clinical, Educational, Vocational, Social Aspects.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966.

Sizer, Theodore R. *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984.

Tyler, Ralph W. *Basic Principles of Curriculum & Instruction.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.

"David Flinders' work captures the teacher's voice that often is absent from conversations about policy and the ways policy can enhance practice. His lessons from the classroom comprise a valuable resource for policy makers or students of education who want to understand more about the "black box" of classroom practice, the ways in which context matters, and the reasons why policy initiatives often disappoint.... Flinders concludes that educational practice *can* inform policy; the reader will certainly conclude that it should."

from the Foreword
by Milbrey McLaughlin

VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE *CAN* INFORM POLICY

ISBN 0-86552-093-3

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403